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INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCES AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

An Inquiry into the Experiences and Barriers of International Students

In the Twin Cities

A Phenomenological Study

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF THE OPUS COLLEGE OF

BUSINESS, ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE,

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

By

Jesse Noah Mongrue

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Jesse Noah Mongrue

Dedication

The researcher would like to dedicate this accomplishment to his parents, even though they are no longer alive, for their sacrifice and support given me during those early days of my upbringing and education. If it was not for their hard work, which had an impact on my success today, I would not be in the United States. This was especially true for my mother, who on many occasions would allow me to leave my native village in Nimba County (Northeastern Liberia) and travelled long distance in order to get an education. And finally, to my family; especially my children who had to endure all the hours that were spent away from them while I am at the library in order to complete my schoolwork.

Acknowledgements

The researcher would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all those who played a pivotal role in guiding me through this long process of the research study. It is important to note that without their assistance, support, and encouragement; including friends and well-wishers who provided the needed counsels, critiques and motivation this work would not have been accomplished. The support received also included those that came from members of my advisory committee: Mark Salisbury, Ph.D. who served as chair of my dissertation committee; and members of the committee: David Jamieson, Ph.D., Robert Barnett, Ph.D., and special gratitude to Mark Salisbury, Ph.D.; who on several occasions counseled and guided me in conceptualizing the thoughts that made it possible to complete the study.

Deep appreciation to Mr. Trent Brager, a librarian at the Minneapolis campus, friends, classmates, and well-wishers; all of whom the researcher conferred with at one point or the other during the development and conceptualization of this study. Most of these colleagues read a portion of the initial draft of the manuscript or suggested methods that led to the successful completion of the data collection process. Some offered critiques and encouragements that were essential in the completion of this research study. Finally, I am grateful to my family for putting up with me while away working on many occasions during the difficult and long process; sometimes denying them quality family times to complete this study.

Abstract

This qualitative research study primarily explored the lived experiences of international students studying at three community colleges in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. As a phenomenological research, its primary purpose was to examine the commonality of experiences and barriers encountered by international students studying at these three institutions. The researcher conducted the study on a wide range of students from a number of nations around the world such as Peru, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, The Gambia, Kenya, Pakistan, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. While it is a fact that this study explored challenges and barriers encountered by nearly all international students studying in the United States, there are limitations to the findings since it only covered international students at three institutions in the Twin Cities.

As a result, opinions, and thoughts, conclusions provided by the participants may not necessarily be the experiences of international students at other institutions or countries. Therefore, data collected in this study was not generalizable, because it is limited to the three institutions where the participants constituted part of the study. However, previous studies indicated similar outcomes of international students. The researcher would like to acknowledge these previous studies as the basis for the problem statement and significance of this study. It is also the hope of the researcher that this study will serve as a guide and tool for graduate students doing a qualitative research, by providing them opportunity to have an understanding of the process and nature of qualitative research especially qualitative phenomenological research. Students

conducting qualitative research should also be able to use this tool because it is rooted in the application of the American Psychological Association (APA) style of writing. This cogent writing style is easy to comprehend because it is user-friendly and convincingly provides clear in-text citations, which are relatively easy to follow.

Jesse N. Mongrue 2019
University of Saint Thomas
Minnesota, U.S.A

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	13
Background	14
Theoretical Framework	18
The Characteristics of Theoretical Framework.....	21
Problem Statement	22
Significance of the Study	25
Purpose of the Study	26
Research Questions	27
Terms and Definitions.....	27
Limitations	29
Delimitations	30
Summary	30
Chapter 2: Literature Review	32
The Fluency in English Language	36
To Return or Not to Return:.....	49
Social Isolation and Alienation.....	50
A Self-Report of English Language Speaking Encounters and Experiences of International Students	51
Academic Life.....	52
Financial Challenges	55

Performance Expectations	57
Second Language Anxiety of International and Students from Refugee Backgrounds	57
Cultural Shock	60
Voluntary Migrant vs Students from Refugee Backgrounds	63
Psychological or Emotional Experiences.....	66
Diversity in Tertiary Institutions: Implication for Educators	66
Conclusion	68
Chapter 3: Methodology	70
The Qualitative Paradigm	71
Research Design.....	72
Participants and Sample	76
Instrumentation	78
Data Collection	81
Data Analysis	85
Organizing the Data	87
Familiarizing Yourself with the Data	87
Identifying Categories and Generating Themes	88
Coding Procedure.....	88
Interview Guide	92
Characteristics of Qualitative Research	96

Summary	99
Chapter 4: Results	100
Introduction of Participants.....	103
Identification of Themes in the International Student Context.....	107
Theme One: A Lack of Employment Opportunities for International Students.....	108
Theme Two: Becoming Home Sick due to Loneliness	110
Theme Three: Cultural Shock.....	112
Theme Four: Financial Difficulties when away from Home Country	114
Theme Five: Differences in Learning Styles	116
Theme Six: Academic Performance Expectation in the U.S.	119
Theme Seven: Difficulties with Learning at Home Country vs the U.S.	121
Theme Eight: Communication Skill as Strength or Weakness.....	123
Theme Nine: Speaking with Accent	126
Theme Ten: English as a Second Language	128
Theme Eleven: English is my First Language	130
Theme Twelve: Differences with Performance Expectation	132
Theme Thirteen: More Academic Resources	137
Summary	145
Chapter 5: Discussion and Interpretation of Findings	147
Research Questions	147

Lack of Employment Opportunities for International Students:.....	148
Academic Life.....	149
Becoming Home Sick due to Loneliness	150
Cultural Shock	151
Academic Performance Expectation in the U.S.....	152
Communication Skills as Strength or Weakness	153
Key Terms in Research Questions on Barriers and Challenges with Learning from Home Country.....	156
Barriers and Challenges with Learning as International Students	157
Academic Life.....	157
Drawing Contrasts from Previous Studies	160
Limitations	161
Summary	162
Recommendations for Further Research for Community Colleges in the Twin Cities of Minnesota:	164
Recommendation One.....	164
Recommendation Two	164
Recommendation Three	164
Recommendation Four.....	165
Recommendation Five	165
Recommendation Six	167
References	169

APPENDIX A	182
List of Questionnaires or Interview Guide.....	182
APPENDIX B	184
APPENDIX C	186
Reasons for Coming to America.....	186
APPENDIX D	188
Interview Guide	188
APPENDIX E	189
Interview 1	189
Interview 2	193
Interview 3	196
Interview 4	199
Interview 5	202
Interview 6	205
Interview 7	209
Interview 8	211
Interview 9	215
Interview 10	218
Interview 11	222
Interview 12	225
Interview 13	228

Interview 14	231
Interview 15	234
Interview 16	237
Interview 17	240
Interview 18	243
Interview 19	247
Interview 20	251

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the last decade, much attention and research have been conducted on international students in the United States. International students studying in the United States have become the focus of attention in the media and a research interest for many social scientists since the attack of September 11, 2001 (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). This focus of attention on international students also includes students at colleges and universities from refugee backgrounds. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) explained the following:

Shortly after the attack, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) became part of the Department of Homeland security as a way to have a more centralized system in the United States Government for tracking foreigners; thereby changing the immigration regulations for international students and those foreign-born national attending universities in the United States (p. 28).

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of international students in academic and social-cultural settings at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. Twenty students were selected to participate in the study (see Appendix A). To meet the objective, this study also synthesized, analyzed, and critically evaluated the literature to highlight patterns themes, conflict and gaps in the study. The purpose of this study was to look at similar populations in the Twin Cities to examine if there are gaps in what was discussed or noted in previous studies. Since this topic has drawn considerable attention in recent literature in the past decade, numerous studies have been conducted on the topic. This study picked up information culled from peer-reviewed journals,

scholarly journals, ERIC, ProQuest Educational journals, empirical studies, books, and college and university publications.

Background

A study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2018) found that in 2017, the United States attracted 19% of all international and foreign tertiary students from OECD and partner countries. The study also found that the United States attracted many more students from abroad than it sent out. For each national student studying abroad, the United States received 14 international or foreign students (OECD, 2018). The writers of the study determined that the United States has the second largest ratio across OECD countries, after Australia. In addition, about one in four international students enrolled in the field of business, administration and law, (OECD, 2018). The study found interesting age differentiation with foreign-born adults who arrived in the United States by the age of 15 and those who arrived at age 16 or older. The study also concluded that students between 21 and 35 years old who were from immigrant background tend to be under-represented among graduate with tertiary education. First and second-generation immigrants made up 14% of the 21-35 years old first-time graduates; although this population represents 23% of the total population of that age group (OECD, 2018).

Ironically, international students studying in the United States have become the focus of attention in the media and a research interest for many social scientists since the attack of September 11, 2001 (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). This focus of attention on international students also includes students at colleges and universities from refugee

backgrounds. Due to regulations put in place after the September 11 attack by the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS); which was a way to have a more centralized security systems in the United States Government for tracking foreigners. Consequently, this new policy changed the immigration regulations for international students and those foreign-born national attending universities in the United States (Poyrazli & Grahame 2007). Some of the regulations instituted by DHS include tougher visa rules for international students to get into the United States. The United States Government also initiated a close follow-up of students through a computerized tracking system (Chapman, 2003).

Despite these regulations, the U.S. continues to host the highest number of international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). During 2002 and 2003 academic year, there were 586,323 international students enrolled in U.S. universities, an increase in the academic year following the September 11 attack (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Enrollment of foreign-born students including those from refugee backgrounds continues to increase. In recent years, international students comprised of 5.5% of all college students in the U.S. according to an Institute of International Education 2019 report. In 2014 – 2015, the number of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa rose by 8% (Institute of International Education, 2015; Kent, 2007).

Studies found that despite strong and growing number of African and other international students enrolled at U.S. higher education, there is little research focusing on their educational experiences such as financial issues, cultural shocks, lack of social support, etc. (George Mwangi, Changamire, & Mosselson, 2019). International students

have not only bring diversity to American colleges and universities; they also help sustain those colleges and universities economically through the tuitions they pay. How do these international students experience the academic and social transition to American colleges and universities? This section showed the role of campus structure and climate; which was the focus of this study.

In this phenomenological study, the researcher interviewed 20 international students as sample population. Of the total number of participants in the study, 40% were males while 60% were females. Regarding the age level, 40% of the respondents were between the ages 20 and 22; 25% of the respondents between 23 and 25; and 30% of respondents between the ages of 26 to 30 years old. Finally, 15% of the respondents were 31 years and older. Table 1 depicts the total number of international students at each community college at the time of this data collection. Table 2 shows the total population of students at each community college according to the information culled from the College Student Handbook and International Student Office. Detail of break-down all tables and graphs about the study are in the Appendix at the end of the manuscript beginning with Table 1, 2. etc.

Table 1
Number of International Students as of 2019

Regions	Anoka-Ramsey	Century	North Hennepin	Total
Africa	38	29	62	99
Asia	27	69	53	124
South America	24	37	35	56

Note

Information culled from College Students Handbook or International Student Office

Table 2

College	Total students' population
North Hennepin	6, 550
Community College	
Anoka-Ramsey	7, 877
Community College	
Century College	8, 745

Note

(See tables for more detail in the appendix sections)

Theoretical Framework

Since a study by George Mwangi, Changamire, and Mosselson, (2019) focused on the experiences of international students in the U.S., the researchers picked intersectionality theory as the most appropriate theory; because it allowed them to examine broader social dynamic with regard to an individual's multiple identities. While this conceptual model of intersectionality examines broader social dynamic, the researcher focused on the portion dealing with educational research to investigate other dimensions of difference, such as immigration, visa, status, and native countries of origin, along with the intersections of more common researched identities, such as race and ethnicity (George, et al. 2019). The study by (Núñez, 2014) observed intersection framework not only emphasizing on individual's experiences with social identities, but also examines institutional and social power that shaped these experiences.

In George Mwangi et al.'s. (2019) study, the writers discussed an intersectional understanding of African international graduate students' experiences in the U.S. higher education system. The study observed the adjustment of African international students in the United States as being different from the experiences of students from other regions. The writers observed that African international students are "considered racial and ethnic minorities in the United States" who are "exposed to racism, nativism, and other discrimination" (p.52). The study also focused on the structural system impacting African international graduate students in the United States. Findings revealed similar challenges such as assumptions made by American peers and faculty, adjustment challenges situated within campus system, and conflict worldviews.

This conceptual framework helps us to understand how African and other international students studying at colleges and universities experience the academic and social transition to college in the United States. “Intersectionality by its nature according to George Mwangi et al. (2019) is the complexity with social categorization of a group of people such as race, class, and gender; which interconnect and create overlapping systems of disadvantage and discrimination that influence inequalities” (p. 54). Studies by George Mwangi have shown that international students do encounter several different kinds of challenges or barriers while studying away from their home countries. The study conducted by George Mwangi et al. (2019) observed that Intersectionality Theory can be experienced at different levels. This issue was also discussed in the (Núñez, 2014) studies because of the considerable attention in the literature. The argument about inequality, discrimination, race, class, gender and overlapping of systems therefore, fits well for this theoretical framework because it describes the experiences of international students.

According to George Mwangi et al., (2019), Intersectionality theory by definition are social categorizations based on race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individuals or group regarded as creating overlapping and independent system of discrimination or disadvantage; because it invites us to examine broader social dynamics with regard to individual’s multiples identities. The research questions for this study clearly focused on the Theory of Intersectionality because it touches on race, nationality, gender equity, discrimination, and the larger societal issues of fairness. In the past two decades, challenges or barriers encountered by international students have gained the

attention of the stakeholders, media and research interests as discussed in the following paragraph from literatures reviewed in chapter two.

The excerpt below also answered these phenomenological research questions, which are the barriers and challenges encountered by international students studying in the in the Twin Cities. This theoretical framework also supports the narrative discussed in the literature review about challenges and barriers that international students encountered while studying here in the U.S.

Consequently, some of the regulations include tougher visa rules to get into the country and a closer follow-up of students through a computerized tracking system. Additionally, the authors argued that in investigating other dimensions of differences, such as immigration, visa status and native country of origin. The investigation indicated that international students encountered barriers in obtaining visa to enter the U.S. and other immigration related documentation. This argument also deals with the intersectionality of more commonly researched “identities as such race and ethnicity” (George Mwangi et al., 2019, .54). The report by George Mwnagi et al. 2019 described the unmet needs of international students; which included students from refugee backgrounds in previous studies at three universities. In the study by (Earnest et al., 2010) examined African and Middle Eastern Students and discussed the means to improve retention rates, student satisfaction, and better academic outcomes at community colleges and universities. Using in-depth interviews to collect data, the participants of the Australian studies discussed that the current support systems and programs at these three universities were inadequate or non-existent. The Australian studies also indicated that

many of the students felt disadvantaged compared to their native-born student counterparts (Earnest, et al., 2010).

The conceptual framework or theoretical framework was also developed based on findings from Earnest et al., (2010) studies are similar to the findings in this research. That Earnest et al., (2010) stud argued that there are challenges such as difficulties with cultural barrier, financial problems, and emotional issues relating to lack of social life. According to the (Sharma, 2008) study, the challenges were due to being home sick or loneliness, second languages anxiety, differences in academic performance expectations and other barriers such as diversity in post-secondary education for some of the international students. The theoretical framework was the result of the primary researcher's in-depth understanding of the topic and interaction with 20 participants interviewed during the data collection process. It supported by various scientific articles cited on the topic in the literature including the Sharma, (2008) study and the Earnest et al. (2010); which were the focus of this study. The theoretical framework of this study is the result of empirical knowledge as a foreign-born student who also experienced many of the issues discussed in this study.

The Characteristics of Theoretical Framework

The researcher of this study learned that there are two underpinnings to the theory. Rossman and Rallis (2017) studies point out a differentiation between the word "Theory" with capital "T" and theory with a small "t". Theory with capital T is a proposition, which is the result of extensive empirical research that has been tested and accepted as explanations for a particular phenomenon. A few examples are the Howard

Gardner's Theory; which explains multiple intelligences or the Piaget's Theory, which explains human development. On the contrary, the researcher's theoretical framework for this phenomenological study is the working understanding of the topic, setting, and situation the researcher is studying. It is the researcher's theory (with a lowercase t). This theoretical or conceptual framework was the researcher's findings of the Rossman and Rallis (2017) studies argued on Gardner's Theory. It was also part of what researcher sees, hear, and experiences re-inform the theories.

Problem Statement

Studying overseas can be difficult and challenging proposition, no matter where one goes for such studies. In the United States like anywhere in the world, foreign-born students experienced different types of challenges. Both female and male students must overcome personal and academic difficulties, adapt to a distinct environment, find ways to fit into the American culture, and satisfy the academic requirements (Contreras-Aguirre & Gonzalez, 2017). The Contreras-Aguirre and Gonzalez, (2017) studies on international female students also maintained that "these women were quite aware of the cultural barriers between their culture and other countries cultures; especially American culture which makes the issue of adjustment more difficult to handle" (p. 36).

Studies have shown that international students experienced countless barriers while studying at colleges and universities in the United States (Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2007). Most of these major barriers that these international students encounter may be unknown to school administrators due to lack of awareness. This lack of awareness by school administrators may sometimes contribute to the reasons why some of these

students do not complete their education or sometimes experience major delays completing their programs. This study focused on three community colleges that are racially and culturally comparative to other community colleges in the Midwest. Literature from other authors on this topic in previous studies has informed the direction of this study to confirm their findings. In an attempt to expand on previous studies, this study examined other challenges and factors that may lead to success in community college for this population of students.

Barriers to success include such issues as difficulty with English language proficiency; which is one of the acculturative stresses (Tung, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003); adjusting to cultural differences and experiencing cultural shock if these barriers are not addressed properly. Struggling with these barriers can eventually lead to anxiety and depression (Swagler & Ellis, 2003) and perceived discrimination, which can also affect these a students' sense of belonging; which is another major consideration of human's need (Maslow, 1962).

Other barriers are inadequate social support, felling home sick, much tougher government regulations, insufficient social systems that will foster or inhabit the adjustment process of the students, financial and family problems such as isolation from home country. These issues vary for some of the students with family members in the United States. Another focus for this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the differences between international students and students from refugee backgrounds who came to the United States through resettlement programs. A study conducted by Swagler and Ellis (2003) indicates differences between the two groups of international students

when it comes to legal status or residency privileges and opportunities in the United States. Another purpose of this study is to provide findings and recommendations to college administrators to serve as an added volume in assisting international students from refugee backgrounds.

A study by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) indicated that international students and host institutions have focused on ensuring academic and social success. The Poyrazli and Grahame study noted that institutions were interested in retaining their international students; however, institutions have little control over some of the barrier and challenges that these students may be experiencing. A few examples of these barriers include the health care system and homeland security procedures. On the other hand, the Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) studies have argued that administrators, student service offices, and faculty within colleges and universities can help international students to successfully adjust to the challenges. The adjustment can be done by implementing programs that address concerns such as accommodations, transportation, social interactions with native-born students, health insurance counseling, discrimination, and academic life that were identified in the Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) studies.

“Other barriers encountered by international students during their initial transition were finding a place to live, getting a social security number and getting a driver’s license, registering for class and learning to use a transportation system” (Poyrazli & Grahame (2007, p. 29). In comparison to their domestic counterparts, refugee international students tend to experience greater adjustment difficulties and more distress during their initial transition into colleges and universities. Within academic life,

international students face challenges such as English language barriers, developing relationships with advisors and professors, and in most cases getting used to teaching and curriculum differences such as expectations for class discussion or questioning the teacher (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). The Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) studies also showed that English language proficiency is an important factor in predicting students' academic achievement.

Despite discussion of the problems experienced by international students, the literature did not adequately indicate some of the pressing issues encountered by international students at the three community colleges in the Twin Cities. The researcher noted that there are other challenges such lack of employment opportunities, the need for internships opportunities for international students, limited work hours on campus, and the need to work off-campus. During the data collection process, these were issues emphasized by all 20 participants in the study. This is an area that provided the researcher's contribution as new knowledge in the field. The researcher also noted that the above challenges continued to have a significant impact on the success of international students; especially their academic endeavors.

Significance of the Study

This phenomenological qualitative research study was primarily intended to serve as resource or tool for educators, college administrators, stakeholders and decision makers who deal with issues relating to international students. This study was also conducted as a resource for college counselors and admissions office staff who encountered international students. Some of these professional may sometimes be

unaware of the issues foreign students experienced while studying away from their home countries. This study covered a range of issues such as language barriers, communication (both oral and written communication), cultural chocks, employment opportunities and social isolations.

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) 2011 – 2012 report, International students represented 3.7% of the total student population in higher education institution in the United States (Clauson-Sells, 2013). Increasingly, these students over the next decades will constitute a significant portion of the U.S. workforce (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011). Over the past decade, the number of international students enrolling in higher education in the United States has been growing rapidly (Institute of International Education, 2019). Further study by Wang, I-C. et al. (2017) indicated that the number of international students enrolling in higher education in the U.S. is projected to reach between eight and ten million by 2020.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore lived experiences and perceptions of 20 international students at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. To better understand the facts they perceived to be contributors or barriers to their academic success in the U.S. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the issues and challenges of international students in three Minnesota community colleges. The researcher planned to interpret the perspectives and needs of international students attending these community colleges. This study planned to

document and describe how these experiences and barriers influence the personal educational outcomes and engagement with community college life and culture.

- The researcher has proposed recommendations based on his findings to community colleges to improve and enhance outcomes and services for international students and students from refugee backgrounds.
- This study was conducted as a tool to contribute to the body of knowledge in addition to the work that has been developed by others on this topic in previous studies.
- The researcher's findings will add to data not found in previous studies as the researcher's contributions to the body of knowledge in the field.

In this qualitative phenomenological research, there were two burning issues that form the research questions. The researcher believed that the two research questions below drove the purpose and significance of the study.

Research Questions

- What are the experiences of international students at Midwestern community colleges?
- What barriers and challenges do international students encounter at Midwestern community colleges?

Terms and Definitions

- **Acculturation** = cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture. Example, the acculturation

of immigrants to American life, also a merging of cultures, as the result of a prolonged contact.

- **Assimilation** = the process by which a person or persons acquire the social and psychological characteristics of a group: “Waves of immigrants have been assimilated into the American culture.”
- **Transnationalism** = going beyond national boundaries or interests comprising of persons, sponsors, etc. of different nationalities.
- **Social Isolation** = is a state of complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and society. It differs from loneliness, which reflects a temporary lack of contact with other humans. Social isolation can be an issue for individuals of any age, though symptoms may differ by age group.
- **Alienation** = the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved. The state of a person who has disengaged himself/herself or has been alienated from the attentions from a person, place, or thing ...
- **Refugee** = any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being prosecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality. This include any person who is unable or owing to such fear or for reasons other than personal convenience, is unwilling to avail herself/himself of the protection of that country (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 1995).

- Intersectionality = is a social categorizations base on race, class and gender inter-connecting and creating overlapping system of disadvantage and discrimination that influence inequalities.

Limitations

The unique experiences of 20 international students might not represent all methods available to all international students in the U.S. to describe the barriers and challenges other foreign-born students encountered in the United States. Additionally this study did not include barriers and other issues the foreign-born students encounter in the k-12 educational environment since the focus of the study was on post-secondary education. The researcher realized that this study did not cover all community colleges or traditional four-year institutions in the United States. While there may be similarities with students in k-12 and other institutions at which refugee and international students are enrolled, the specific dynamic for each population may vary given the intensity and anxiety levels that international students encountered in the tertiary education system in the United States.

This study focused primarily on three community colleges in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/Saint Paul, Minnesota. Therefore, the data might not have reflected the issues that foreign-born students encounter in the other parts of the country. Additionally, the sample size of 20 is limited to a small number of international students at three community colleges. The study was also limited in part because the sample was skewed towards African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latin American students; regions where the international students in the study live. The researcher did not interview

international students from Europe, Australia, and other parts of the world. Therefore, findings may not be transferable or generalizable to other situations or cases.

Delimitations

Due to the difficulties in reaching international students by phones or emails to collect data, the researcher decided on another strategy to reach potential participants. One of the ways that resulted in positive outcome was a face-to-face contacts with each participant. This process was also time consuming. Sometimes, the researcher would travel long distance and spent hours waiting in order to meet with participants. The researcher would travel to college campuses and assert himself, beginning with an introducing, the purpose for the study and provided participants with information such as approval letters to conduct research, etc. Consequently, the strategy was successful in obtaining the data needed.

Summary

In this first chapter, the researcher discussed an overview of the study beginning with an introduction and problem statement; he described gaps or needs for further research and his possible contribution to the body of scholarly literature. It continued with the significance of the study, depicting why this topic is worth investigating; it described the purpose of the study and, the justification for conducting this study. This chapter also provided the research questions or burning concerns that the study hoped to answer; terms and definitions that might be unknown to the readers, and limitation to the study were also included. This chapter, in addition previewed Chapter two through a

brief discussion of how the literature review examined previous studies that informed the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher explored work done in previous studies on international students to determine commonality of the experiences. As a result, this study was replicated to examine what sort of challenges international students encountered in previous studies. Consequently, the researcher discussed challenges and barriers that became part of the findings in the current study. In this chapter, those findings were referenced by the researcher to form key portions of the researcher's discussion and investigation. Below are excerpts taken from the literature review cited by the researcher of what the writers noted in the literature.

The literature report described the unmet needs of international students from refugee backgrounds in previous studies at three universities in Australia. The study specifically examined African and Middle Eastern Students and discussed the means to improve retention rates, student satisfaction, and better academic outcomes at the universities (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010). Using in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions, the participants of the previous study reported that the current support systems and programs at these three universities were inadequate or non-existent. The report also indicated that many of the students felt disadvantaged compared to their native-born student counterparts (Earnest et al., 2010).

A study by Poyrazli and Grahame, (2007) noted that despite these regulations, the U.S. continued to host the highest number of international students during the 2002 and 2003 academic year, there were 586,323 international students enrolled in U.S. universities; an increase in the academic year following the September 11 attack.

Enrollment of foreign-born students including those from refugee backgrounds continues to increase in recent years. International students comprised 5.5% of all college students in the U.S. according to an Institute of International Education 2019 report. Earnest, Joyce, Mori and Silvagni (2010) described the unmet needs of international students in previous studies at three universities; they examined African and Middle Eastern students and discussed the means to improve retention rates, student satisfaction, and better academic outcomes at the universities.

In the literature review, the authors reported that international students from the regions above, encountered challenges such as feelings of isolation or (loneliness), anxiety and depression, cultural shocks, lack of social support, differences in performance expectations, financial constraints, lack of gainful employment opportunities, social issues, and cultural issues. The literature indicated that participants of the study reported that the current support systems and programs at these colleges and universities were inadequate or non-existent. The report also indicated that many of the students felt disadvantaged compared to their native-born student counterparts (Earnest, et al., 2010).

A related study with the push for internationalization on campuses across the globe, including the U.S., the study found that growing number of universities and technical institutions are encouraging their students to take part in study and residence abroad programs or vocational training schemes. Such training as apprenticeships, work placement in foreign languages and cultures (Davis, 2003, as cited in Jackson, 2008). In the same study, Davis found that in 2004 there were 2.7 million students enrolled in

higher education outside their home countries according to 2007 estimate of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD's estimate was supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); that this number would increase to almost 8 million by 2025 (Davis, 2003; as cited in Jackson, 2008).

A study by Michelle Metro-Roland indicated that student mobility is often viewed as the hallmark of internationalization. U.S. universities normally sent their domestic students abroad and serve as host to students from around the globe, in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, non-degree exchanges, and undergraduate and graduate degree programs. The number of international students on U.S. campuses is seen as a relevant maker of a college or university's global engagement (Metro-Roland, 2018, p. 1408). Those in international education know that mobility and getting students to move from one place to another is only part of the story. On the other hand, the knowledge transfer that takes place is vitally important. While it can be argued that students should learn in the classroom and learn their disciplines in different ways, what is really critical is the hope for these international educational experiences will change perceptions (p. 1409).

International students' perspectives can introduce and inspire domestic students to learn about worldviews they would not have considered otherwise, (Deardorff, 2006). The interaction between domestic and international students can improve cognitive ability for domestic students (Mamiseishvili, 2012) and in globally competitive economy, exposure to this diversity can prepare domestic students for the workforce by helping

students to understand global perceptions that are different from their own (Manns, 2014; Treat & Hegedorn, 2013). Similar support was put out by the (UNESCO, 1998) World Declaration that higher education should be “equally accessible to all on the basis of merit” and that institutions should not discriminate on the basis of economic disparity, Western institutions of higher education commonly recruit international students in an effort to recuperate funds from state disinvestment (Adnett, 2010; Schofer & Meyer, 2005).

A U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs underscores this idea that educational exchange affects real change, leading to those who venture abroad to better understand others (Bureau of Education, n.d.). As international populations have grown, universities have had to look more closely at questions of inclusion, and how international students are acclimating, and being acclimated, to the social, cultural, and academic norms in their host countries and communities (Metro-Roland, 2018, P. 1408). The author found that when students do better, they feel a sense of belonging, whether they are domestic or international. The researcher observed this argument to be consistent with findings in the literature review and the current study. This article offers a view of how creating conditions that allow for a multiplicity of identities for international students might foster a sense of belonging and social engagement.

Study abroad has changed in recent years, as Jackson (2008) explained, “there is a wider range of program options with a greater variety of goals.” According to the Jackson, some students take part in programs that are designed to enhance their foreign

language and cultural learning; while others focus on the acquisition of professional skills in another global market with option of doing coursework in their native language while studying abroad. The study also indicated that some international students were encouraged by faculty members from their home institutions while other students travel on their own and took courses with local students in the host institution. While studying abroad, housing arrangements may also vary, for example, homestays, dormitories with local and other international students, shared apartments with students from the same ethnic and linguistic groups (Jackson, 2008).

This study is not only designed to benefit international students or students from refugee backgrounds but also for those doing business globally and those who crosses cultures to relate and benefit to the issues that are raised for discussion (Jackson, 2008). Like their male counterparts, female international students studying at post-secondary institutions in the United States are also part of this study. These female students, too, are aware of the challenges and barriers through first-hand experiences about the difficulties they have encountered. It also showed how to overcome difficult situations by implementing strategies; whether personal difficulties or academic difficulties, to succeed as international female students in the United States.

The Fluency in English Language

One major difference in comparing international students studying abroad, particularly those who come to the United States is the necessity of becoming fluent in speaking English. When comparing foreign language students who remain in their home environment to those who study abroad, they gain the ability to speak English with

greater ease and confidence, realized by a greater abundance of practice, spoken at a faster rate and characterized, correspondingly, by few dysfluent-sounding silent and/or filler pauses (Freed, 1995; as cited in Jackson 2008). Previous studies support to the notion that studying abroad can help learner of foreign languages (especially English language learners) become fluent speakers of the host language.

Research has found that discourse management and conversational ability of those who studied abroad display a wider range of communicative strategies that students who have not been abroad. Those who studied abroad also have demonstrated ability to initiate, participate in, and maintain an interaction with people (Freed, 1995, as cited in Jackson, 2008). However, the author identified a few weaknesses in the study such as the failure to measure adequately that language growth of the most advanced international students. The research also acknowledged that “applied linguists have much to learn how these international students actually spend their time while studying abroad; which language they speak with their friends and host families” (p. 3).

The increasing numbers of international students and students from refugee backgrounds justify why this population requires more in-depth attention and study. Having an awareness of the barriers faced by international students and students from refugee backgrounds will enable community colleges in the United States to provide proper services for this emerging population. Research indicates that many of these foreign-born students eventually become members of the U.S. workforce system when their legal status is adjusted, which is vital to the growth and sustainability of the economy. Arguably, higher education is among the United States’ top service sector

exports. These institutions provide revenue to the U. S. economy as individual state hosts international students and student from refugee background for living expenses such as room and board, transportation, text books and supplies, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items (Open Doors Data Special Reports: Economic Impact of International Students section para 1).

Community colleges have a unique opportunity for mitigating these barriers because they are conveniently located for most of these international students and students from refugee backgrounds and have much lower tuition rates. Other reasons community colleges are critical to this population is that they accommodate students who work or have family responsibilities, they have open admissions process, and are well suited to in meeting the needs of international students and refugee students by providing such opportunities such as English Language skills, tutoring and preparation for the labor markets (Teranishi, et. Al., 2011). Community colleges also provide more opportunities for these foreign-born students to develop interpersonal relationships with their teachers by having a one-on-one interaction, which may be more difficult at a four-year university setting. As a result, community colleges serve as a gateway to other opportunities for many foreign-born students.

A National Educational Longitudinal study done by (Ordovensky & Hagy, 1998; as cited in Rincon, 2008) showed a significant differentiation between native-born and international students and students from refugee backgrounds at community colleges when it comes to enrollment options. The result shows that community colleges provide more access to immigrants or international students than native-born students due in part

to flexibility in course scheduling and a more inclusive campus climate. Additionally, community colleges offer vocational education that provide more attractive enrollment options for those international students and students from refugee background who want to further their education but are uncertain about succeeding in a traditional academic field. The study also indicates that both first and second-generation immigrant students are more likely to enroll in community colleges than their native-born counterparts (Rincon, 2008).

While community colleges may have low costs in tuition, the financial stress on these public institutions cannot be overlooked. Most community colleges lack the funding to handle increasing enrollments, creating pressure for cost cutting. “Nonessential” services such as counseling are often the first to go (Zeidenberg, 2008). The number of part-time faculty members has been increasing, with more of them working at more than one campus. Research indicates that student engagement with one campus can promote retention and positive outcomes; however, heavy use of part-time faculty who are unlikely to have attachment to any one campus is not likely to promote such engagement. This tends to hurt international students who may face issues such as language, cultural adjustments, and other issues while they are studying in the United States.

Community colleges are under financial stress because most of their funding is from only three sources: local property taxes, state allocations, and student tuition and fees according to research. Revenue from outside is limited because the cost of tuition and fees is low, averaging about \$2, 400 annually compared to about 6, 200 at four-year

public colleges according to the American Association of Community Colleges. In contrast, tuition at elite colleges is even much higher; for instance, at Columbia University, tuition is \$37, 000 in 2008 and at the other elite colleges, it is even more, which allows for many more services to students (Zeidenberg, 2008). State funding fluctuates as the economic and political landscape and community college leaders increasingly complain that they are not receiving enough state support even to keep up with the inflation and enrollment increases. The issue of financial stress face by community colleges is significant since it is where the majority of the international students attend.

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of international students in academic and social-cultural settings at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. To meet the objective, this study synthesized, analyzed, and critically evaluated the literature to highlight patterns, themes, conflict, and gaps in the study. The purpose of this study is to look at similar populations in the Twin Cities to examine if there are gaps in what was discussed or noted in previous studies. Since this topic has drawn considerable attention in recent literature in the past decade, numerous studies have been conducted on the topic. This study also picked up information culled from peer-reviewed journals, scholarly journals, Eric, ProQuest Educational journals, empirical studies, books and college and university publications.

The literature was divided into 10 topics and subtopics such as (a) Introduction, (b) difficulty with English proficiency, (c) Adjusting to cultural differences, (d) language anxiety, (e) inadequate social support network, (f) cultural shock, (g) financial

constraints, (h) voluntary migrants vs. students from refugee back grounds (i) theoretical framework, and (j) summary and conclusion. In this study, the focus on international students who are studying in Minnesota as an effort to examine the same issues and challenges at three Minnesota community colleges. Studies have shown that international students experienced countless barriers while studying at colleges and universities in the United States (Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2007).

In the introduction of this dissertation there is the background of the problem which provides information about the history of the problem; the problem statement that explains the actual problem; the purpose of the statement that provides the central phenomenon; the research questions that are derived from the purpose statement; and other relevant parts of chapter one (Terrell, 2016). While this section of the manuscript is intended to discuss these essential components of Chapter one, the primary focus of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of international students at the three community colleges in the Twin Cities. Below are the primary purposes of the essential components:

Terrell (2012) explained that there are six characteristics of a good problem:

- The problem is interesting to the researcher.
- The scope of the problem is manageable by the researcher.
- The researcher has the knowledge, time, and resources needed to investigate the problem.
- The problem can be researched through the collection and analysis of data.
- Investigating the problem has theoretical and practical significance.

- It is ethical to investigate the problem.

The author provided three things to consider in conceptualizing a problem:

- “Don’t try to investigate all the world’s problems.
- Don’t try to investigate some of the world’s problems.
- But rather investigate one problem” (Terrell, 2016, p.10).

Terrell, (2016) provided the following excerpts as a summary for Chapter one below:

“understanding and clearly stating the problem you are investigating is the first step in writing a good proposal. Keep in mind, he argued while formulating a good problem statement, you (the researcher) must ensure you meet the following criteria” (Terrell, 2016, p.18). The author discussed additional characteristics of a researcher in a qualitative study:

- The researcher must be interested in the problem you are investing.
- The scope of the problem you want to investigate must manageable.
- The researcher must be comfortable in terms of the knowledge, time, and resources necessary for the researcher to investigate the problem.
- The researcher must be able to collect and analyze the data.
- There must a practical and theoretical reason for the researcher to investigate the problem.
- It must be ethical for the researcher to investigate the problem” (Terrell, 2016, p. 18).

Figure1: Indicates the key barriers and challenges reported in the literature review

below:



Most of the major barriers that international students encounter may be unknown to school administrators due to lack of awareness. This lack of awareness by school administrators may sometimes contribute to the reasons why some international students do not complete their education or sometimes experience major delays completing their programs. This phenomenological qualitative study focused on three community colleges that are racially and culturally comparative to other community colleges in the Midwest. Literature reviewed from previous studies on this topic has informed the direction of this study to confirm the authors' findings. In an attempt to expand on this study and related research studies, the researcher examined other challenges and factors that may lead to academic success in community college for international students.

An extensive literature review revealed several areas that have a direct bearing on the current research study. This section of the dissertation offers a synthesis of the findings from previous studies on the topic. Studying overseas can be a difficult and challenging proposition, no matter where one goes for such studies. In the United States, like anywhere in the world, foreign-born students do experience different types of challenges. Many of these international students and students from refugee background have had countless experiences. These barriers include issues such as difficulty with English language proficiency; which is one of the acculturative stresses (Tung, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003); and adjusting to cultural differences and experiencing cultural shocks, when it is not addressed properly. This issue can eventually lead to anxiety and depression (Swagler & Ellis, 2003) and perceived discrimination or being discriminated against which can also affect these students' sense of belonging, another major consideration of human needs (Maslow, 1962).

Other barriers are inadequate social support, feeling home sick and tougher government regulations, insufficient social systems that will foster or inhibit the adjustment process of the students, financial problems and family problems. Many of these students support their own families in the United States. Besides identifying the barriers that face community college students in the Midwest, another focus of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the differences between international students and students from refugee backgrounds that came to the United States through resettlement programs (Maslow, 1962). A study by Maslow (1962) indicates differences between the two groups of international students when it comes to legal status or residency privileges

and opportunities in the United States. A third purpose of this study is to provide findings and recommendations to college administrators about how to serve these international students and students from refugee backgrounds.

Despite the cultural, social, linguistic, and economic experiences foreign-born students encountered while studying abroad from their native lands, international students continue to flock in North American universities. “There has been much scholarly literature and empirical evidence to substantiate this argument, particularly in the United States and Canada; two North American countries that house the largest populations of international students attending post-secondary education” (Yin, 2013, p. 139). Because the focus of this study was primarily on experiences of international students in the United States, the majority of the research studies cited were focused on the experiences of these students in the United States. Notwithstanding, some experiences of international students in other countries will also be reviewed. For example, a study conducted by Earnest, Housen, and Gillieatt (2007) examined perspectives of students from Middle Eastern and African countries and provides important insights into the experiences of similar students at institutions of higher education in the United States.

In another international study, preliminary research at Murdoch University in Western Australia showed that, in spite of the relatively good levels of spoken English skills, many students from refugee backgrounds from Africa still had trouble with transition into tertiary education. Some of the barriers identified in the Australian study included developing a more critical and reflective learning styles, applying meta-cognitive strategies and balancing learning with earning and adapting to Australian

values and systems (Box, 2007 as cited in Earnest et al., 2007). The study demonstrated that early engagement of international students with their challenges and campus community life in general can lead to a greater psychosocial well-being, student satisfaction, improved performance and increase retention rates within the university (Housen & Gillieatt, 2007; Silburn, 2010).

Due to the importance of findings discussed by (Housen & Gillient, 2007; Silburn, 2010), the replicated excerpts of previous studies were considered by the researcher in the current study. This helps to determine if the same findings are similar with the current student population in a different setting like community colleges in Minnesota. The objectives of this research were to examine and explore the perspectives and needs of international students attending post-secondary or (tertiary) education; document how these barriers influence their personal educational outcomes and community college lives, and propose student-based recommendations to college administrators on how to serve, improve, and enhance outcomes for the students. Other important findings for this study are ways to determine if there were parallel of the Australian experiences of the same population in Minnesota.

The Housen and Gillient, (2007); Silburn, (2010) study in Australia covered international students and students from refugee backgrounds in three different locations around the World: Middle East, Asia and Africa, which is similar to the population for the current study in Minnesota. The only difference is that the study in Minnesota was focused on three community colleges; whereas the Australian study dealt with four-year traditional universities. However, the population in the study by (Housen & Gillient,

2007; Silburn, 2010) had similar lived experiences. In this phenomenological research, the researcher observed that both studies had commonalities in lived experiences; such as financial problems, feelings of home sick, social isolation and alienation, etc. The researcher also would like to argue that future researchers should consider additional research in different regions to explore findings that will contribute to the body of knowledge in the field. Table 1 of Appendix A summarizes the key barriers and challenges that international students and students from refugee backgrounds encountered while studying in the United States. These key topics and sub-topics were the focus of attention discussed in the same literature review. The researcher also built on these key findings to address the research questions in chapter one. During data collection, the researcher compared these in-depth interviews of participants of their lived experiences to what was reported in previous studies.

Other examples of the challenges encountered by international students are not having the knowledge and skills to communicate orally. This was one of the major barriers faced by international students and students from refugee backgrounds studying at community colleges in the United States (Sharma, 2008). Oral communication, at its most basic level, refers to the spoken and stress interaction between people (Sharma, 2008). Sharma (2008) argues that several factors affect one's ability to be able to have oral communication with people such as grammatical knowledge of the language, social and cultural knowledge of the people who speak the language and speaking skills. Accordingly, grammatical knowledge refers to one's understanding of the grammar,

vocabulary, sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonations, and stress (Rutherford, 2014).

Secondly, English is not the dominant language for most international students and students from refugee backgrounds. While many of them learn English in their home countries, there are very few opportunities to speak English outside of the classrooms. Additionally, the format in which English classes are taught is often large and in lecture-style teaching; giving the students inadequate time to practice their English-speaking skills (Wang et al., 2017). As a result, many international students cannot express themselves in spoken English and are thereby unwilling to communicate with native English speakers. “The unwillingness serves as a one of the major barriers for international students and students from refugee backgrounds because it limits them opportunity to produce English output in an authentic context. Subsequently, such barrier impedes their English acquisition” (Wang et al., 2017, p. 560).

Another social barrier was insufficient cultural knowledge of Americans. This lack of cultural knowledge may also lead to the unwillingness to communicate with Americans whether on college campuses or out in the community. All of these experiences of fear and anxiety in speaking English prevent international students or foreign-born students from communicating with native English speakers (Wang et al. 2017). The needs of international students and students from refugee backgrounds are very complex and multifaceted requiring a coordinated approach among educational institutions, families, and communities (Earnest et al., 2017). This result by Earnest,

Housen, and Gillieatt (2007) revealed that educational institutions are the appropriate settings in which many of the hopes of these international students would be realized.

Foreign-born students find educational institutions to be a safe environment for them. They enjoy learning and the routine that educational institutions provide.

International students also face the challenge of making new friends and coping with loss of social support systems. Loss and lack of social support, in particular, have been found to lead to lower academic achievement and negative psychological experiences such as tension, confusion, and depression (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pedersen, 1991).

To Return or Not to Return:

A study done by Cheung and Xu (2015) examined the intention to return to home in mainland Chinese students at elite universities in the United States. The study indicated that students studying at prestigious universities tend to have a two-way push and pull model on the return home or not home phenomenon. The result of the study highlighted several aspects relating to the choices they make after graduation. The finding confirmed a long-held concern regarding the low rate of international students who return home from overseas study. Unlike their counterparts who study at mid-ranking universities, the mainland international Chinese students who study at elite U.S. universities are more likely to get job offers upon graduation (Cheung & Xu, 2015). In addition to the low rate of those international students returning to their home country, the United States has a long-standing tendency to absorb foreign-born talent and

professionals in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics due to a severe shortage of candidates.

Zweig, Fung, and Han (2008) also agree with these findings that after international students finish their studies, they often permanently stay after they obtain suitable jobs, start their families, and begin to enjoy their careers in the United States. The findings also suggest that academic and economic factors have a greater deterrent effect on the return intention than political, social or cultural factors. The findings in the study conducted by Zweig et al., (2008) are similar and consistent with other studies on refugee international students who are studying in the United States; whether elite or mid-rank universities (Cheung & Xu, 2015).

Social Isolation and Alienation

Social isolation was another common form of stress among international students and students from refugee backgrounds, who may have lost significant social relationships when they first came to the United States. As a result, many of these students may experience a sense of social loss (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Owie (1982), also found evidence that international students experience a higher level of social isolation than do non-international students. This sense of alienation and isolation may make international students and students from refugee backgrounds feel unsettled in their new place. Difficulties in acculturation, such as values and lifestyle conflict, may increase the intensity of social situations. As international students and students from refugee backgrounds experience a lack of fit with the United States lifestyle, they may be

reluctant to become involved in social situations and make new friends in the host culture.

International students and students from refugee backgrounds are observed to be lonely and more cautious than their U.S. counterparts (Parr & Bradley, 1991). Parr and Bradley found that the feelings of alienation towards the new environment could worsen the degree of social isolation, and vice versa. A continuous state of isolation and loneliness may reinforce a sense of helplessness among international students and students from refugee backgrounds. These barriers, in turn, can increase the likelihood that the students may become depressed. Investigations have shown that social isolation and loneliness are the causes or directly connected to depression and stress related illnesses among international students and students from refugee backgrounds (Ebbin & Blankenship, 1986; Svarney, 1989).

A Self-Report of English Language Speaking Encounters and Experiences of International Students

In the United Kingdom, Copland and Garton (2011) conducted a study which focused on the English language experiences of a group of pre-sessional and under-represented students. The study investigated the opportunities that such students have to use English outside of the classroom has shown to be the key factors in foreign-born students' satisfaction with their study abroad experience. While such information is useful in indicating the sort of interactions in which the students are involved, it tells us little about how they are experiencing their encounters. To this end, these international students were asked to report on both types of encounters of a self-report of English

language Speaking encounter and experiences of international students to say how they felt about their diaries. This study and previous research suggested that students' interaction with the host culture, especially at the beginning of a period of study abroad, can be negative (Brown, 2009; Jackson, 2008; Morita, 2009).

In their study, Copland and Garton (2011) examined where the students had opportunities to use English. Overall, their study reported four types of encounters. They included service encounters, where language was used transnationally to obtain information or to get things done; and they found social encounters, where language was used internationally to start or maintain relationships. Other encounters were casual encounters, which were encounters that took place with complete strangers such at city train stations; and the fourth was academic encounters where student talked about course-related issues outside the formal setting of their lesson (Copland & Garton, 2011).

Academic Life

To build on studies conducted by Lee and Rice (2007) which were identified as barriers to academic success for this population of students, this study investigated three kinds of experiences by foreign-born nationals. The expected barriers and challenges this study uncovered included difficulties with speaking English as a second language, cultural differences, different styles of learning; financial struggles, the sense of belonging on college campuses and in the community, and unemployment. All of these challenges were due to lack of legal status or perception of discrimination, especially, after the September Eleventh World Trade Center attack in New York City (Lee & Rice, 2007). Lee and Rice (2007) found the following:

That these difficulties have resulted in disadvantaging institutional policies, hostility toward cultural attributes such as language barriers and foreign accents, and the negative stereotyping of whole nations or cultures, all of which hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendships and obstruct intellectual growth; all which can ultimately undermine the outcome of exchange (p. 405).

Students coming to the United States may encounter difficulties beginning as early as obtaining permission to pursue education (Lee & Rice, 2007). Immigration regulations and interviews have become burdensome enough to discourage students from applying to U.S. institutions (Altbach, 2004). Those that persist have encountered mounting fees and delays since 9/11, which has diminished their chances of filling the university seats they were offered; in addition, some who have their visa denied were blocked from enrollment. Words of such experiences move quickly among the population of prospective international students who weigh the time and resources spent in seeking entrance to the United States against the less onerous regulations of other countries such as Canada and Australia (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Aside from obstacles with entering into the United States, social and community factors strongly affect international students' experiences after arriving and their decision to persist. Studies have by Bevis, 2002; Cole and Ahmed (2003) noted the differences in social acceptance by country of origin and culture of international students and students from refugee backgrounds. For example, long before the event of 9/11, women who wore veils or saris have had difficulties integrating with campus life and suffered unpleasant experiences (Bevis, 2002; Cole & Ahmadi, 2003). In their study of 190

students from Latin America and Asia studying in the U.S., Wilton and Constantine (2003) examined acculturative factors related to adjustment issues. They found that because of language and cultural factors, Latin American and Asian students have greater levels of stress than other international students studying away from their home countries.

A research study conducted by Lee and Rice (2007) has documented the tremendous difficulties that refugee international students encounter but frequently fails to critically examine the underlying reasons why these international students struggle in their host environment. In their study, Lee and Rice (2007) revealed that some of the worst hardships in negotiating university life were due to the foreign national status of some of the international guests. The authors explained that “these difficulties run from students being ignored to verbal insults and confrontation” (p. 405). The study also found how these incidents occur in a range of contexts, both in and outside the classroom by peers, faculty, and members of the community. In their study, it shows that not all international students are subject to the same hardships. For example, students from Western and English-speaking countries in the study encountered minimal to no discrimination, compared to students from other regions.

Lee and Rice (2007) also argued on the basis of their findings, that a form of neo-racism on international students from non-Western and non-English speaking countries is a framework by which to understand some of the experiences of some foreign-born students, not only in the United States but throughout the world (Lee & Rice, 2007). They also argued that this framework helps to identify direct and indirect undermining of international students’ capacity to become fully participating members of their host

community. Lee and Rice (2007) stated, “These difficulties have resulted in disadvantaging institutional policies, hostility toward cultural attributes such as language barriers and foreign accents; and the negative stereotyping of whole nations or cultures, all of which hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendships and obstruct intellectual growth which should affect the outcome of exchange” (p. 405).

Financial Challenges

One of the major challenges international students faced studying at United States is financial. A study by Hammed in (2014) on international students from Iraq, the author described the experiences of Iraqi students who chose to complete their degree in the U.S. The author found that tuition, books, and other associated fees may present a dire challenge to this population of students (Hammed, 2014). The author described the difficulties these students encountered before the U.S. counsel granted them a visa. To obtain a visa, these students must document their ability to pay tuition, room, board, and fees (Dorsey, 2012). Hammed (2014) found, “Specifically, students with F-1, F-2, J-2 and G-series visas must have enough resources to meet their expenses throughout their stay” (p. 5). As international students, they do not qualify for financial aid. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only U.S. citizens and eligible noncitizens may receive federal student financial aid. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (2019), international students are prohibited from working off-campus during their first academic year. However, they may take on campus employment subject to certain conditions and restrictions because of their immigration status. The policy however

required international students to work off-campus after their first academic year. The off-campus employment must be related to their areas or fields of study.

Additionally, the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, required every applicant to have a social security number in order to apply for federal student financial aid. Concern over costs for completing a college education in the U.S. may distract an international student from his or her academic goals. According to the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 report of international student of the East Tennessee State University, the International Students Merit Scholarship covers only half of in-and out-of-state tuition and maintenance fees; with no additional fees or costs covered. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Office, F-1 students are prohibited from working off-campus during their first academic year; but may accept on-campus employment subject to certain conditions and restrictions. The policy further required international students to work off-campus after their first academic year. This off-campus employment must be similar to their field of study (Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, 1992).

These restricted work opportunities severely hamper international students' ability to support themselves throughout their college career in the U.S. Previous studies have shown that due to the financial restrictions, some of the international students are left with no choice but to discontinue their studies and return home (Koyama, 2010). Consequently, as Koyama found, Iraqi and other international students must rely on student and personal loans; which is a short-term solution to the financial crisis that faced international students studying in the United States (Lee, 2013). Lee also found that

particular concerns are the international students who do not qualify for low-interest loans and must rely solely on higher interest personal loans to finance their college and in some cases graduate education in the U.S. Unfortunately, U.S. colleges and universities often failed to balance the financial needs and qualified job opportunities of international students (Hammed, 2014). Alternatively, some international students also search out colleges that award more merit aid, in the hopes of getting enough grants to reduce their total net cost of college (Clark, 2010, as cited in Hammed, 2014).

Performance Expectations

International students highly value their academic performance and are very sensitive to issues of academic performance (Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991). International students and students from refugee backgrounds expect to do as good as, if not better than, they previously did in their own countries. Perception of academic performance could either facilitate or hinder their adaptation process. If these students perceive that they are academically successful, they are likely to feel more confident in living in their new environment. Otherwise, they may feel that things are out of their control and that there is harm and threats to their welfare. For example, when an international student or students from a refugee background who has been a student in his or her home country earns a grade of “C” in a course in North America, (the United States in particular), that students may regard this as a harm or threat. Such expectations related to academic performance are among the main stressors affecting most international students’ adaptation process (Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991).

Second Language Anxiety of International and Students from Refugee Backgrounds

Pederson (1991) and Wehrly (1988) argued that the key variable that interrelated with many stress factors in educational and socio-cultural domains was second language anxiety. Language barriers may generate both psychological harm and a tangible threat to international students whose first language is not English (Pederson, 1991; & Wehrly, 1988). According to these authors, the problem is psychological in the sense that it can have a strong and long-lasting impact on the person's self-concept and other related cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects during adjustment to the unfamiliar host culture. If international students do not have adequate language skills, they may find themselves at a disadvantage in their academic and social lives. It is not difficult to imagine how one would feel when he or she is having a hard time understanding and being understood by others in an unfamiliar host culture. To support this argument, Ishiyama (1989) also explained that difficulties in verbal and written communication may cause international students to feel uncomfortable in daily life and may lead to feelings of insecurity. The English language was identified as a major problem for some of the international students because of these findings. English proficiency is significant and related to lack of academic success and social adjustment for these students in the United States (Strange et al., 1999). A language deficiency may cause lack of participation in the classroom by international students. Limited English proficiency might be evident in international students and students from refugee backgrounds reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

In addition, foreign-born students may require more time for reading and writing, which may interfere with their academic performance, especially if there is a set time to

finish an exam (Strange et al., 1999). However, despite this lack of proficiency of international students, the population of English as a Second Language (ESL), learners have increased significantly in higher education settings in the United States (Strange, et al. 1999). According to a study conducted by Yuko Iwai (2008), there were approximately 583, 000 international students enrolled in American universities between the 2006 and 2008 academic year, the study found that more than half of international students were from Asian countries such as India, China, South Korea, and Japan. In that same period, there were 35, 300 Japanese students enrolled in higher education in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2007).

Interestingly, the researcher observed in the study that Japanese ESL students are generally unsuccessful when studying in English speaking countries (Hayes, 1979; Matsumoto, 1994; Ota, 1994). Another study by Butler & Iino, (2005), found that most Japanese students only study in order to pass the university entrance examinations that consist of analytical and grammatical skills of reading, rather than communicative skills. Speaking with an accent is another factor that affects international students and students from refugee backgrounds. Speaking with accent can affect foreign-born student's ability to function in social and academic settings. Based on accent, listeners will evaluate the speakers' competence, social status, social attractiveness, personality, and similarity to the listener (Strange et al., 2017).

Research has shown that “nonnative accents can lead to stereotyping and discrimination on the part of the listener, whereas the listeners associate a Standard English accents with higher social status, intelligence and education” (Strange et al.,

2017, p. 477). According to Bertram et al., (2014), English proficiency was one of the constant stress factors during the acculturative process of students from refugee backgrounds and international students perusing higher education in the United States.

Cultural Shock

International students and students from refugee backgrounds may also experience cultural shock and other challenges such as being away from families and lack of social support while adapting in the host country. The process of cultural adjustment is a struggle for many foreign-born students. One study found that Chinese International students, especially those who are recent arrivals in the United States, have many similarities with other international students (Ching, Renes, McMurrow, Simpson, & Strange, 2017). Another study by Wilton and Constantine (2003) found that there were similarities among length of stay in the U.S., cultural adjustment difficulties, and psychological distress in sample populations of Asian and Latin American students attending college in the United States. Wilton and Constantine's findings suggested that the length of stay in the U.S. is negatively associated with acculturation stress. Both Asian and Latin American students who have resided in the U.S. for longer periods tend to report lower levels of distress in adjusting to U.S. cultural norms. These students may also have more established social support networks than students who may have recently immigrated into the U.S. Wilton and Constantine's (2003) findings also suggested that there is a relationship between acculturative and psychological health. When acculturative stress interplays with other stress factors such as cultural shock, lack of social support, language barriers, classroom transition, and academic pressure, this may

trigger mental health problems. The greater the distance between the native culture and the host culture, the more difficult it may be for students to have accurate predictions and interpretations of the behavior in the host culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Redmond & Bunyi, 1993).

The first years for international students in their host country can be stressful. The challenge of leaving one's own culture to learn and adjust to new norms and values can sometimes be exciting and rewarding to these students. Many of the study participants in Furnham's and Bochner's (1982) study not only reported experiencing challenges from their dual role of studying and working, but also encountered stress in their new environment. Some of them recalled feelings of homesickness after their arrival in the United States. One male student from Malaysia report feeling homesick due to changes in the weather. Commenting on his feelings, he noted the following: "Within one week it was snowing, raining, and sunshine" (Kwadzo, 2014, p. 286).

Another female student also commented:

Everything in the U.S. is cultural shock, I feel lonely. I see unfamiliar people and things. These things make me feel homesick. I see things I am not used to seeing. I cannot help and this makes me feel homesick (Kwadzo, 2014, p. 286).

Although culture shock is a general challenge to many international students and students from refugee backgrounds during their early period in the United States, these students had to adjust to their new environment, particularly in the classroom and in their place of employment. They had to work with people of different cultures and adjust to changing weather patterns (Kwadzo, 2014). Studying abroad is a big change in the lives

of students since they were encountering new experiences and perspectives in their new and unfamiliar country of residence, the United States. In Poelzl (2002) and Storti (2007) study of cultural adjustment the authors found that the arrival of foreign students and any foreign-born individuals in a new setting is normally associated with a rising tide of emotions. In the Poelzl (2002) and Storti (2007) study, more than half of the international students reported experiences of cultural shock. Some of the students relate their homesickness and depression to the unfamiliar people and things around them. While international students are required to adjust to new cultures during their early period in the United States, these students, especially those that are employed, had to fine tune new ways of doing things both in the classroom and in the workplace. Moreover, some of these students complained of discrimination in their workplaces. The negative workplace experiences were also attributing factors to the adjustment challenges in their new working environment (Kwadzo, 2014).

Not much discussion was done in the literature reviewed by the authors when it comes to cultural differences with international students studying in the United States. However, cultural difference is not discounted among the challenges that international students experienced while studying in the United States. Perry, Lausch, Weatherford, Goeken and Almendares (2017) noted that cultural and economic differences present complications for international students. The researcher of the study by Perry et al., (2017) argued that there were other obstacles. This showed that international students encountered challenges while studying in the United States. For example, the American education system differs extensively from those of some other nations according to Zhai

(2002) as cited in Perry et al., (2017). According to the author, the hierarchy and curricula may differ significantly; thereby posing additional challenges for international students. These barriers can be particularly troublesome for Asian students as these languages lack a direct translation to English (Roy, 2013).

Voluntary Migrant vs Students from Refugee Backgrounds

There is significant differentiation between refugee international college students and voluntary immigrants. An analysis was completed on the acculturation process in a study done by Boyle and Ali, (2009). The study showed the culture, structure, and refugee experience in the Somali community in Minnesota. Using the case of family dynamics among the Somali refugee community, the authors found that the same factors that were theorized to affect “voluntary migrants” are also important to refugee international students. Specifically, when it comes to the nature of the exit from the sending or home country, the reception in a new location, group characteristics and other aspects, all appear to be important (Boyle & Ali, 2009).

However, Boyle and Ali’s study found that there are specific concerns that will be more relevant to refugees than to those that are voluntary migrants. Specifically, the ongoing condition of the sending society and the effect of any transitions on transnational ties to the sending society are critically important in the refugee context. The study demonstrated how the societal upheaval that created the Somali refugee community also affected their culture and connections within Somalia; and how this has an ongoing impact on the U.S. Somali refugee community. An example of transnationalism or cross border phenomenon that differentiate “voluntary migrants and “refugees” is having

experiences in two different cultures or having the perspectives of two cultures. The authors argued “it is valuable to refine the acculturation frame when considering refugees” (p. 47).

In a study by Van Hook (2012) using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to examine students’ response on transcultural resonant themes and images, 500 international students from 35 different countries took courses; with the highest number of students coming from Japan, South Korea, Germany, and Turkey. The highest percentage of the international students were female; with 55% total, followed by male of 45%, of which most were in their 20s through the mid-30s (Van Hook, 2012). The author observed that during classroom sessions, international students tend to sit in small groups of one to five students of the same nationality, depending on the size of the class and the national mix. The Turks sat with Turks, Japanese with Japanese, Brazilians with Brazilians, and so forth. The study also found that it was common for the students to interact within their groups while video clips are playing, communicating among others in their own cultural groups when a particular clip interested them along linguistic or cultural lines (Van Hook, 2008).

According to the Van Hook study, the experiences of these international students are no different from the challenges faced by refugee international students and other international students who are the focus of this research study.

Segal and Mayadas (2005) found that:

Regardless of economic, civil and political impetus to leave, the alternative of life in the United States may appear preferable, although the move may be dangerous

or traumatic, as it is for many undocumented immigrants (Segal & Mayadas, 2005, p. 564).

Although refugee students are immigrants, and after a year in residence in the United States they can adjust their official status (especially those that want to make a career in the United States), the psychological profile of a large proportion of the refugee populations has little in common with most voluntary immigrants. Regardless of the visa under which they came, if they have a visa, voluntary immigrants usually arrived on their own volition (Segal & Mayadas, 2005). Most voluntary immigrants were motivated by the attractiveness of living in the United States; and they usually planned their entry carefully and selectively, bringing some assets while relinquishing much in their home countries. Segal and Mayadas (2005) found that “Regardless of economic, civil, and political impetus to leave, the alternative of life in the United States may appear preferable, although the move may be dangerous or traumatic, as it is for many undocumented immigrants” (p. 564). Refugee international students on the other hand were taken away from their homelands, and heretofore, most have not come directly to the United States, instead arriving at the borders of countries that neighbor their homeland and serve as first countries of asylum.

Refugees are also selectively resettled in the United States or other nations based on guidelines defined by the host country. Most refugees leave their homes unwillingly, and many probably prefer to return to their home country if safety permitted. Many people and students from refugee background leave home with very little or no planning; flee with few, if any, tangible belongings, and suffer inconceivable atrocities in the form

of prosecution, degradation, and violation. Most witness the destruction of their fundamental rights and lifestyle; with the most significant destruction however, being political (Segal & Mayadas, 2005).

Psychological or Emotional Experiences

Psychological experiences include phenomena such as homesickness, disorientation, depression reactions, and feeling of isolation, alienation, and powerlessness (Day & Hajj, 1986). In another study by Sandhu and Asradadi (1998), the authors explained that international students like their domestic counterparts, experienced academic stress. However, international students usually do not have similar resources to combat this stress. (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1998). There is evidence that students' country of origin determines the amount and type of psychological reactions they show. As Yeh and Inose (2013) argued, European students reported experiencing less acculturative stress than students from Asian, Central/South American, and African countries.

Another key stressor that non-European international students experience while studying in the U.S. is discrimination; which may lead to lower self-esteem, depression, and other mental health problems (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005).

Diversity in Tertiary Institutions: Implication for Educators

Changes in the tertiary education sector have resulted in academic staff having to accommodate a higher proportion of students from diverse backgrounds, and tertiary institutions globally have been moving towards greater recognition and support of diverse groups through bridging, foundation, and fast-track programs. Educators in today's

increasingly diverse learning environments need to recognize differences among students and promote effective communication so that all students (including international students and students from refugee backgrounds) can gain competencies that assist them to successfully function in a pluralistic society (Northedge, 2003). In the study by Earnest (2010) found the following:

That the establishment of appropriate cultural and social settings is an integral aspect of the learning process; adding that this will assist in the realization of an individual's learning potential and future goals and hopes. (p. 157)

Multicultural and pluralistic nations require that particular attention be given to students with little experience in academic communities, who struggle to develop an understanding of the expectations of academic cultural. The challenge of these students is to develop an effective voice which speak the discourse; whether in writing or in class. Such support in establishing voice is a vital component of courses for students from diverse backgrounds (Northedge, 2003).

As the number and diversity of international students and immigrants in general increase, U.S. demographics, including those associated with the student body of higher education are changing (Rincon, 2008). The Rincon (2008) argued that "a large proportion of international students, especially Asian and Hispanic students begin their education career at community colleges" (p. 97). The literature depicts that only limited knowledge is available about the success of these students at community colleges; because of lack of available institutional, state, and national data on the educational experiences and outcome of the students. Community colleges have been the primary

resources to respond to diverse needs and create opportunities in communities and the regions they serve (Rincon, 2008).

The literature shows that support for international and immigrant students at the post-secondary level is often unplanned and not generally recognized as a necessity (Rolph & Melamid, 1996 as cited in Rincon, 2008). The Rolph and Melamid (1996) also explained other critical issues that international and immigrant students faced in community colleges such as tuition policy, limited English proficiency, and advising and counseling services. “Although postsecondary education does not guarantee life skills and individual well-being, it is a key determinant of economic success and social mobility” (p. 97).

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter examined the empirical research that focused on several key sub-topics such as the social lives of refugee international students who are studying in the United States, the issue of social isolation and alienation, difficulties coping with academic life, and performance expectations set by the host institutions. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the social dynamic of international students and student from refugee backgrounds in the United States; discussing second language anxiety, which is one of the primary barriers for foreign-born students. Lack of English proficiency can prevent international students from becoming academically successful.

The other barriers discussed in this chapter are loneliness and isolation; all of which are due to lack of support, and stress issues associated with acculturation in the host country. Examining related issues in previous studies, the researcher observed issues

discussed by authors such as psychological experiences of refugee international students. Dealing with the issue of diversity in tertiary institutions are some of the pertinent challenges for administrators. Lack of awareness about the gravity of the experiences of international students examined in previous studies was reviewed. All of these barriers have been identified as challenges for international students in the literature. Additionally, recommendations have arisen from these studies to overcome the challenges for this unique population of students. Given the growing population of these students in the Midwest of the United States – and Minnesota in particular – it is imperative that more is learned about the challenges they face and new recommendations that can improve their chances for academic success are uncovered.

In that chapter, the researcher examined and compared what others have written about the topic in the literature review in order to triangulate arguments by various authors. This chapter enabled the researcher to have an understanding of real-life experiences of international students at the three community colleges in the Midwestern region of United States. In that chapter, the researcher provided detail of the approach used to conduct the study. For example, how and what method the researcher applied to arrive at findings and conclusions from previous studies. In the methodology, the researcher also explored any limitations that were not discussed in previous studies; as means to establish any gaps to the body of knowledge.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative research study utilized the semi-structured interview to explore and understand the lived experiences of 20 international students (Appendix A- Demographics of respondents) studying at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. This method was chosen by the researcher to answer the central research question: what are some of the barriers and challenges international students encounter at U.S. colleges and universities? Fifteen semi-structured questions (see Appendix B) were chosen in the words of Padilla-Diaz (2015) “to address the phenomenon profoundly, providing a space of aperture for the informants to express their experiences in detail, approaching reality as faithfully as possible” (p. 104). Creswell (2007) argued that we do qualitative research on several grounds; for example, when we want to empower individuals to share their stories.

Likewise, we conduct qualitative research because of a need to study a group or population, to identify variables that can be measured, or to hear silent voices. Finally, we do qualitative research because we want to understand the context or setting in which participants in a study address a problem or issue (Maxwell, 2005, p.57). The researcher was interested in examining and gaining a deeper and richer insight of the lived experiences through the eyes of each international student as they navigated their college experience. In his pioneer study qualitative research design, Maxwell (2005) cited five useful goals of qualitative research:

- Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts they give of their lived experiences;
- Understanding the particular context within which the participants act and the influence this context has on their actions;
- Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences and generating new, grounded theories about the later;
- Understanding the processes by which events and actions take place; and,
- Developing causal explanations (pp. 221-222).

The Qualitative Paradigm

In this study of international students studying at three community colleges in the Mid-Western United States, it is appropriate to establish fair, respectful, and trusting relationships between all parties involved in the process. As Terrell, (2016) notes, “it is imperative that this relationship must exist knowing that the information uncovered is contextual, with the researcher being respectful to varying viewpoints and subjective truths that might arise from interactions with multiple participants” (p. 154). A qualitative research method is usually effective when the researcher wants to explore the lived experiences of participants over a considerable period. Consequently, the researcher considered a qualitative phenomenological approach as the scientific justification because phenomenology is the type of qualitative research that explores the lived experiences of individuals or a group of people.

The following excerpts depict the research design process beginning with participants and sampling. The advantage of this approach is that it seeks to inform or allow readers to understand the participant's reactions, feelings, experiences and opinions as they provide an in-depth narrative of their lived experiences to the researcher. This study also targeted students who have spent one to three years as international students in the United States to be selected for the study. This approach was intended to provide an in-depth understanding of their experience in studying abroad, particularly in the United States. Important subgroups in the sample population include students who received support from their families and those that are receiving scholarships or government sponsored from their home countries.

This study employed qualitative research methods primarily attempting to interpret and describe the experiences of the participants. As an interpretive method, this study revealed themes in the stories of the participants that described their real lived experiences. It described the barriers and challenges they have experienced as international students. These are students who attend the three community colleges in the Twin Cities of the United States. These community colleges are some of the largest and most diverse community colleges in Minnesota.

Research Design

The phenomenological research design was suited for this study because it seeks to explore lived experiences of the participants through their own world-view (Maxwell,

2005; Creswell, 2007; Williams, 2007; Astan, 2013; Padilla-Diaz, 2015; Trochi, Donnelly & Arora, 2016); & Qutoshi, 2018). In a seminal publication, Bliss (2016) argued that phenomenological research is about what experiences mean to people. Phenomenological research according to Bliss (2016) “requires the researcher to focus on people’s experiences of a phenomenon to gain comprehensive details that provide a basis for reflective structural analysis that ultimately reveals the essence of the experience” (p. 14). In contrast, Hall, Chai and Albrecht (2016) sees it as research that describes the meaning of a lived experience.

In another study, Yuksel and Yildirim (2015) make the argument that the purpose of phenomenological research is to understand and describe a specific phenomenon in-depth and reach at the expense of participant’s lived experience of the phenomenon. Thus, the design of the study was to use open-ended interview questions to explore the lived experiences of 20 participants. As phenomenological research, the researcher conducted the study in natural settings rather than in control environments in order to have an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Qualitative researchers seek answers to their questions in the world. Choosing a phenomenological approach, the researcher intended to understand lived experiences of participants who have encountered certain phenomenon.

In the design of phenomenological approach, there is one advantage to consider; that is it seeks to explore or investigate the lived experience of a small number of people or individuals. In this process, extensive and prolonged engagement with individuals typifies the work, often through a series of in-depth, intensive, and interactive interviews,

(Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The process involved description, interpretation, and critical self-reflection into the “world as world”, (Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p.5). In this process of design, the researcher was interested in investigating the participant’s perspectives, feelings, experiences, and personal opinions during the data collection.

In order to enhance the data collection process, the researcher spent considerable time in reaching out to each participant to schedule a reasonable time that worked for them; sometime, traveling a distance to meet with the participant at an agreeable time and place to conduct the interview. It was always important to gain the informed consent of participants before conducting the interview. The ethical principles underlying informed consent include fully informing participants of the study purpose, ensuring that participants understand their participation details that they are willing to participate in the activities and letting them know that they may withdraw from the interview at any time without prejudice (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

During the interview process, each participant responded to ten open-ended questions and several follow up questions to enable the researcher to accurately record and document the data. The interviews were also tape recorded and transcribed to allow the researcher to triangulate the data to increase the dependability and trustworthiness of the research. To mitigate any irrelevant narratives from the data, participants were informed in advance the importance of tape recording the interview. This process also made the transcription of the data easier without going back to each participant for clarification. Each interview activity was scheduled between 30 to 45 minutes.

Working in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) policy, permission was obtained from the University of Saint Thomas. Human subjects participating in the interview were made aware that their privacy was protected. Assuring them that no results, either from individuals or groups would be tracked back to a single person. Participants were warned in advance that reflection of past or present experiences may cause emotional distress. If such feelings occurred, they were free to end the interview or activities at any time. A letter was provided to each participant or human subject that was involved in the study about the protocol of conducting ethical research. For example, participants in the study were assured of their confidentiality. They were also assured that the activities regarding their participation in the study were voluntary.

The participants were also informed that they are free to discontinue the activities at any time. The participants were assured that all documentation used during the exercise would be destroyed after the research was complete as required by the policy of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This means that all interview protocols were considered and observed including avoidance of biases as part of the researcher ethical requirements during the entire process. In compliance with ethical requirements, a formal letter was sent to each participant. In the letter, it must spell out the schedule details such as date, time, and confidentiality concerns, etc. for the research activities. The letter also spelled out the flexibility of the researcher to accommodate the schedules of the participants. Rossman and Rallis (2017) argued that it important for the researcher to explore the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of the participants during the interview exercises, because it enabled the opportunity to have in-depth understanding of the story.

Finally, Creswell (2007) maintained that phenomenological qualitative research explores meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences and of a concept or phenomenon. “It focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Creswell concludes by describing major procedural steps in the process of conducting a phenomenological study:

- The researcher should determine if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach;
- The researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenon;
- Data is collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon;
- The participants are asked two broad, general questions: (a) what have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? (b) what contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? (p. 59).

Participants and Sample

The participant sample for this research study included persons from of several different countries around the world who currently reside in the Twin Cities in the State of Minnesota. These participants were international students who are attending two years of post-secondary education in the Twin Cities. Most of these international students had lived in the state for at least two years and enrolled at their respective institutions for more than two to three semesters. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified a purposive sample of 20 international students with an age range from 21 to 45 years.

These participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study as part of the University of Saint Thomas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) and research requirements.

Gaining the informed consent of the participants is crucial for the ethical conduct of the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Consequently, the researcher was familiar with the University of Saint Thomas' requirements for conducting a research involving Human Subjects. The researcher participated in the Human Subject Review Committee requirements and successfully completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training in the application of the informed consent form for conducting research under the auspices of the University of Saint Thomas. Those ethical principles underlying the informed consent included the following:

That participants were fully informed as possible to the details about the purpose of the study and audience. That participants in the study understand what their agreement to participate entails. That they give that consent willingly or voluntarily. That they understand they may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. That their confidentiality was fully protected as argued by Rossman and Rallis (2017). These ethical principles were also stated in previous sections.

The population for this phenomenological research was international students in the Twin Cities; who were primarily selected from three community colleges. These students came from Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. All of the students came to the Twin Cities in the last two to three years to pursue a post-secondary education. All 20 of the participants were purposively identified by the dean of students through a formal request to the college stating the purpose of the study. Communication

to the three community colleges included a face-to face meeting with authorities of the colleges with details of the project such as meeting the University of Saint Thomas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. This process included submitting letters of invitation to potential participants, scheduling arrangement to meet with participants, and conducting the actual interviews. This process was time consuming and required commitments by the researcher to be patient. On many occasions, the researcher had to make the efforts to go to where the participants were such as the schools or a more convenient place that fit their schedules.

Once participants were identified by the college, the researcher would then make the conscious effort to contact them by email or phone calls. Sometime these arrangements took a week or two to finally get the interview done. During the interview process, the participants were asked to sign a consent form; explaining to the participants the purpose of the research, how long the interview will take, participants' rights, and other necessary ethical considerations before participating in the exercise. The researcher also assured participants about confidentiality policies, about how the data will be collected. The researcher also informed participants that the activities would be tape recorded, field notes would be taken, etc. The primary ways of gathering qualitative data are through interviewing, observing, and reviewing material culture such documents, artifacts, decorations, etc. (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

Instrumentation

In qualitative studies, the interview guide approach is typically used (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The purpose of this study is to elicit the participant's worldview on the

topic. As a result, the researcher developed categories or topics to explore while at the same time remained perceptually open to pursuing topics that the participants bring up (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). To achieve this objective, the researcher developed research questions (Creswell, 2013). To have in-depth understanding of this phenomenological study, the researcher developed 10 open-ended interview questions to address the research questions. After approval from the University of Saint Thomas's Institutional Review Board, students who met the inclusion criteria were contacted with formal communication; such as letters, emails, or phone calls. At that point, recruitment of participants began.

The recruitment process continued until the minimum sample size of 20 participants was completed. A convenient time and location for the interview was established. Using the interview guide, the researcher conducted an in-person or a face-to-face interview. In an effort to accommodate the participants, each interview lasted not more than an hour. There were self-reporting interviews of the participants; allowing the researcher to contact potential participants from a list provided by the college. The participants interviewed in the study were evenly divided between males and females who provided narratives of their lived experiences as international students studying at a Mid-Western Community Colleges. Sample participants were predominantly minority international students or students resettled in the U.S. from Africa and the Middle East as refugees.

Other students interviewed came from Latin American countries who have had barriers with adjustments while pursuing higher education in the United States. This

interpretive approach provided a detailed examination of personal lived experiences as the participants were engaged in real sense making of what they had experienced or continued to experience. The researcher also asked participants several follow up questions to develop an in-depth understanding of the data collected. During the interview, participants discussed their education experiences both in their home countries and in the United States. The open-ended questions and the face-to-face interview approach allowed participants to describe the impact of their lived experiences, feelings, emotions, and opinions. This is the uniqueness of qualitative phenomenological research because it is time consuming and allowed detailed description of the participant's narrative (Rossman & Rallis, 2017).

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used international students studying in the Twin Cities of Minnesota as the primary participants of the study. Students resettled here from refugee background were part of the study because of their experiences as foreign-born nationals. Methodologically, the researcher identified a purposive sample of 20 international students and students who were resettled in the Twin Cities, in the age range from 25 and 45 years who participated as interviewees for the study. To obtain triangulation of the data, participants were selected from different regions of the world by the researcher regardless of race, gender, or nationality. At that point, recruitment of potential participants began. The recruitment process continued until the minimum sample size of 20 participants was complete. The process also included contact of the human subjects or participants who would participate in the study. A convenient time, date and location for the interviews arranged between the

researcher and the participants. During the interview section, an interview guide comprising of the questions were given to the participant before the interview begin. The researcher also explained to the participants that there may be a follow up questions for clarification purposes. All of which are listed in the interview guide.

The Research Procedures

Upon completion of sampling and a suitable participant s are recruited, the researcher established a mutually agreeable time and place to conduct the first interview Terrell, (2016). This involved contacting participants by phone or email to arrange for a face to face meeting. At this point, the participants were reminded that the interview was being recorded and then the researcher began the overarching research questions. The participants were also given a consent form to sign; indicating their willingness to participate in the study. The participants were also informed how long the interview will take, the freedom to discontinue the interview if they feel uncomfortable, etc.

Data Collection

For this study, the open-ended semi-structured interview was appropriate to explore the lived experiences of international students at three community colleges at the Twin Cities. Dejonckheen and Vaugh (2014) agreed that the purpose of semi-structured interview is to gather information from key informants who have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs related to the topic. Prior to the collection of the data, the researcher was trained in qualitative research methods. After that, the researcher completed the interview questions and pilot tested them with his colleagues and university professors who had expertise in qualitative research methods. Changes were

made to the interview questions based on feedback received from colleagues and university professors.

The researcher also obtained a letter of approval from the IRB's office to conduct the research, Informed Consent Form provided by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E) at the beginning of the interview. A formal letter was sent to each student participant and dean of student approval letters from the dean of student at each community college before meeting with them to collect the data. Participants were asked to sign the agreement (Consent form) and those who did not, were not pressured to participate in the study. As is common in conducting qualitative phenomenological research, convenience sampling was used to select the participants. The Researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews with the students. The research questions were directed at the lived experiences of the international students, their feelings, and belief systems. The researcher audio-recorded the interview with permission from the participants. Jamsted (2014) says the recording of interviews makes it easy for the researcher to focus on the interview content and the verbal prompts and thus enables the researcher to generate verbatim transcripts of the interview. Each interview was recorded on separate cassette and labeled with an interview code.

In addition, the researcher took field notes and wrote a reflective journal during the interviews. The interviews took place in a quiet room provided by the college; designed to fit the students' schedules. Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, to accommodate the students' preferences about time for the activity. The researcher

interviewed 20 participants that were conveniently sampled during the data collection process. These 20 participants were attending college as international students or who (at the time of this study) had been attending college in the Twin Cities for at least one to two years; some of these participants had been students at these colleges for more than two years. These participants were comprised of both males and females who have experienced barriers, challenges, and issues that previous studies have addressed in the literature review and in chapter one of the proposal. Because this is a phenomenological study that uses a qualitative method, using an interview approach was the most appropriate choice to provide the researcher the ability to describe and explore a common meaning for several individual of their lived experiences of a phenomenon; by focusing on what the participants have in common, as they experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The nature of the interview questions was upon-ended and done in a natural setting while the participants were comfortable and free from any form of stressful condition. Using interviews as instruments in the data collection process, participants were given the opportunities to describe their lived experiences and challenges encountered while studying at the college and living in the United States in general. The interview session lasted between 30 to 45 minutes to complete the entire exercise, allowing participants to have control over how they chose to answer the questions. The researcher also created a welcoming atmosphere during the data collection process, in order to gain more insights from the participants. The research questions were about the

challenges that these international students encountered while attending college in the U.S.

In addressing these questions, the researcher looked at previous studies. Data from participants in the current study helped to answer the research questions. In the literature review, the authors provided data that were helpful in answering the questions. In a qualitative research, a convenience sampling, as the name suggests, is a type of non-probability sampling method where the sampling is taken from a group of people easy to contact or to reach (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Once the data is collected and transcribed, the researcher then read the data by listening to the recording in order to ensure that there was accuracy in the interview process. Field notes were also taken by the researcher in order to identify the beginning, middle, and end of participants' stories. Upon completion of the stories, the researcher informed the participant that a draft of the narrative may be returned to the interviewee to verify that all facts, dates, and other information were accurately portrayed. If there were any discrepancies to the information provided by the participants for correction, they were clarified or corrected.

As a result, the raw data reported by the researcher was in the form of narratives through participant's interviews. During this process, raw data were obtained by the researcher from all 20 participants. Rossman and Rallis (2017) noted that data analysis can be either on-going while the research is being conducted or at the end of the data gathering. The writers discussed that the on-going analysis starts when the researcher has framed the questions. The same study by Rossman and Rallis also indicated that "experienced field workers tend to describe and analyze as they go" (p. 229).

Thus, responses collected from the international students during the interview process were tape recorded and transcribed in the form of narratives. The participants' responses which were provided in their words in the form of storytelling were based on their lived experiences as international students. The data was coded for organization; which in qualitative inquiry is "most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldana, 2016, p.4). The themes and meaning collected from data by the researcher were analyzed and coded to make sense of the data, (p.4).

Data Analysis

After the interview, the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis. The interviews also included field notes taken to gain a sense of the information gathered and reflected the meaning. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The researcher highlighted significant statements, quotes, key words, phrases, sentences and statements so as to allow the participants to speak for themselves. These were coded into major themes such as: culture shock, home sickness, isolation, loneliness, stress and finances. This study explored and described what is already written and known about the problems, answer specific questions about the problems; determine if there are any gaps to what previous writers have observed and how this study will contribute to the body of knowledge for future applications. The study analyzed findings from previous studies to determine if the data are similarities of participants' lived experiences to the populations in the current study. Additionally, the study used previous studies to determine what issues other international students have encountered as means to expand on.

This study also provided a theoretical and practical framework that was considered by the researcher as part of the body of knowledge toward this topic to improve and enhance future research, outcomes and services for international students who attend colleges and universities in the Twin Cities. In addition to the stated purpose, the researcher made the effort to determine if there are any contrasts in previous studies to compare to the current study. The process of analyzing data can happen in two ways: (1) ongoing analysis; which begins when the research frames the research questions. The second option is doing the analysis at the end of the data gathering process (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). For this study, the researcher focused the data analysis process by building relationships with the participants. This approach helps to make the data collection process easier.

In order to conduct a phenomenological research that is rooted in the exploration of lived experiences of individuals or group of people, the researcher realized that building relationships with participants allowed them to freely express their feelings, emotions, opinions, and thoughts on the topic. “The process of data analysis also involves bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p.237). The data analysis process consisted of three primary activities such as fully knowing the data or immersion; organizing the data into a piles or chunks and bringing out meaning from those data (Rossman, 2017). The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. The process of transcribing data consisted of taking recorded narrative and putting it into written form. The transcription of the data also involved reading and listening to the data to ensure accuracy. After listening to the recorded data, the

researcher began to analyze the data in order to develop credible themes or words and phrases.

In order to report the results of the data, the themes were then organized to provide consistency of the report and accuracy. Field notes were also taken by the researcher in an effort to identify the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Upon completion of the story, a draft of the results was given to the interviewees. The rationale for this is that in an event that there are discrepancies, the draft can be modified. Organization of the themes for reporting results of findings and recommendations were made in Chapter 4. At this stage of the study, the researcher was focused on understanding and sorting out key components of the data after the interview. This study was focused on the eight phases of the data analysis; which includes the following below:

Organizing the Data

This process involved taking an inventory of the note cards of the data the researcher had gathered; performing minor editing works that are necessary to make field notes retrievable and doing some general clean up on the data. Of course, this general clean up and organizing process was ongoing. At this point of the analysis, the researcher began to take note where the interview was conducted and who was interviewed; and the date of the interview transcriptions. Other details included quotes from the participants and artifacts the researcher may refer to, if there are any.

Familiarizing Yourself with the Data

The researcher was fully immersed with the data collected by reading and rereading, and more reading; through the data in an effort to be acquainted or familiarized

with the participant's responses. Because the researcher is an oral learner, listening, listening and listening again to the tape-recorded interview was very critical and appropriate.

Identifying Categories and Generating Themes

The researcher began to group, and code (or putting themes into category); the data that represents segments of the data that are relatively discrete.

Other activities included coding the data; which is primarily thinking through what the researcher will take as evidence of a category or themes and generating the themes; and interpreting the data by attaching significance to what was found in the study and making sense of the data. The final activities of the data analysis of study were searching for alternative understandings by demonstrating the interpretation that is sound, logical and grounded in the data. The study ended with writing the report. At this final stage the researcher provided a narrative of findings and recommendations for readers and other stakeholders such as the college and the dissertation committee at the University of Saint Thomas.

Coding Procedure

A code in qualitative research is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summation, salient essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Saldana also noted that that "data can consist of interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journals, documents, open-ended survey responses, drawings, artifacts, photographs, video, Internet sites, email correspondence, academic and fictional literature, and so on,"

(p.4). The process of coding is somewhat similar like identification of themes where words, phrases or sentences are identified by the researcher as themes.

This is a critical link between the data collection and the explanation of meaning. From the data standpoint, the researcher must be reflexive about what the data, what the participant said during the collection process, and the interpretation of the data. It is critical that the researcher become reflexive to avoid any sort of biases in interpreting the data.

As Saldana (2016) noted:

Coding required that the researcher wear an analytic lens. But how the researcher perceives and interprets what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens and from which angle the researcher views the phenomenon (p. 8).

To codify is to arrange things in a systematic order, to make something part of a system or classification, to categorize. Fundamentally, there are differences between codes and themes. A theme can be the outcomes of coding, categorization, or analytic reflection, but it is not something that is in itself coded; (that is, there is no -theme coding).

Saldana (2016) explained the theme-coding differences:

Think of a coding as a category as a word or phrase describing some segment of your data that is explicit, whereas a theme is a phrase or sentence describing more subtle and tacit process. (p.16)

Coding enables the researcher to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or families because they share some characteristic. The researcher used classification reasoning plus his or her tacit and intuitive senses to determine which data “look alike” and “feel alike” when grouping them together, (Saldana, 2016, p. 10). The necessary attributes of coding required the researcher to be organized, to exercise perseverance, need to be able to deal with ambiguity, need to exercise flexibility and finally need to be creative, and need to be rigorously ethical. Honesty is perhaps another way to describe being ethical, because it implies that the researcher will always be rigorously ethical with his or her participants, and treat them with respect; and ethical with their data and not ignore those seemingly problematic passages of text; and rigorously ethical with his/her analysis by maintaining a sense of scholarly integrity and working hard toward the final outcomes. “Creativity is essential for his and/or her data collection, data analysis and even for the final report writing” (p.39).

The researcher was also mindful in the transcription of the data collected. All recordings done during the interviews were carefully transcribed, codified, and the data verified by the researcher to ensure accuracy. After the transcript was verified and carefully studied, the data was then analyzed into themes by the researcher. The process involved categorizing themes, re-arranging the data and putting together themes that were similar on one category until every theme were analyzed by the researcher. Usually, it is a four-pass approach where on the first pass, you attempt to identify common themes in your data. On the second pass, you assign interview segments to a common theme. On the third pass, you collapse similar themes into a single theme. Then, on the fourth pass,

you re-examine your data to determine if the interview segments you identified in your first pass align well with your existing theme categories. If they do not, you may have to add to or collapse your categories of themes or try to use a description of data analysis from one of the main studies that has influenced your study.

After the themes that represent the lived experiences or opinions of the participants were identified, they were then organized by category for placement into tables. The researcher then used the data for the purpose of reporting the results in Chapter 4. Using an interpretive approach by examining and describing the type of barriers and experiences of international students and students from refugee backgrounds in tertiary education at community college. Documentation of the research activities were conducted at three different stages of the interview process. The process was evaluated and an effort to identify the beginning transitions, stories and emotional statements to allow real live connections between each phenomenon.

Additional reference material from published literature were used to complete the description and exploration of the experiences and barriers of the students. The initial draft of the interviews was returned to the interviewees to verify that all facts are accurately presented and recorded by the interviewees. If this was a case of focus groups, similar procedures and protocol would have been followed to ensure that participants treated fairly. In an event that there were discrepancies to the report, the first draft will then be modified by the participants as needed.

Interview Guide

In the analysis stage, the researcher created an interview guide; which was primarily intended to elicit the participant's worldviews on the issues. In other words, to uncover the participant's meaning or perspectives, while at the same time, respecting how the participant frames and structures responses to the interview questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). The research was also posed open-ended questions in order to have an opportunity to request an elaboration on participant's responses. A typical interview guide for phenomenological research study consist of the following activities:

- Introduction = where the researcher provides a brief bio of himself to the participants before the interview begins.
- An overview and purpose = the researcher then provided the primary purpose and brief history of the study to the participant.
- Informed consent form signed = the researcher discusses some ethical guidelines to the participant as required in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) the purpose of the consent form.
- The form is then signed by the participant or the interviewee, after understanding the purpose for signing and participation in the study.
- Ownership of consent = for example, who will use the data after it is collected?
- Tape recording = the researcher proceeded with the data collection process by interviewing the participant.
- Body of the Interview = at this point, detail of the data collection is carried out; with time frame not more than an hour.

- Other phases of the interview guide include the research topic or themes, elaborations or follow up questions; transitions, (where the conversation is changed to another topic, summaries of the discussion and finally the researcher giving thanks to the participant for their his or her willingness to participate in the study and closure.

Table of demography

The researcher interviewed 20 international students for the sample population. The table is in this appendix for the committee members to review. Below are the tables broken down based on the students' demographic such as sex/gender, age, income, and education levels; as shown in the following tables:

Table 3
SY (school year) 2018-2019.

Number of International Students as of 2019

Regions	Anoka-Ramsey	Century	North Hennepin	Total
Africa	24	29	62	99
Asia	20	69	53	124
South America	14	37	15	56

Information culled from College Students Handbook or International Student Office

Below is the total students' population for all three community colleges

Table 4

Total Students' population

College	
North Hennepin	6, 550
Community	
College	
Anoka-Ramsey	7, 877
Community	
College	
Century College	8, 745

(See tables for more detail in the appendix sections)

Gender/Sex

Table 5
Sex of the Respondents

Gender/Sex	Number	Percentage
Males	8	40
Females	12	60
Totals (N)	20	100

Age

Table 6
Age of the Respondents

Age	Number	Percentage
18-20	8	40
21-25	4	20

26-30	5	25
30+	3	15
Total (N)	20	100

Income

Table 7
Income Level of the Respondents

Income	Number	Percentage
\$10000-\$15000	5	25
\$16000-\$25000	8	40
\$26000-\$30000	4	20
\$310000+	3	15
Total (N)	20	100

Educational Level

Table 8
Educational Level of the Respondents

Education	Number	Percentage
1 st Year	14	70
2 nd Year	6	30
Total (N)		100

The tables were needed in this phenomenological study because the researcher needs to state it at the beginning of your findings; right at the beginning of the research

findings in chapter 4. Of the total number of participants in the study, 40% were males while females constituted 60%. With respect to age level, 40% of the respondents were between the ages of 18-20; 25%. The age range was between 21-25 years, then closely followed by 20% who were 21-25. The rest, 15% were the age 30+. In regards to financial level, 40% of the respondents said they had an income ranging from \$16 to 25 thousand dollars, 25% had incomes of 10 to 15 thousand dollars and 20%, 26 to 30 thousand dollars.

The rest, 15% had income level of 30 thousand plus. Seventy percent of the respondents were 1st year students followed by 30% 2nd year students. Once you set this up, then you begin stating your findings of the interview.

Note: This table does not go into chapter 4 findings. It goes in the Appendix.

With regards to your second table, the total number of participants (20) in the study does not warrant setting up a table for that. Set up the table to include the total number of international students at the three colleges based on the regions they are from.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. “Qualitative research also consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible, because these practices transform the world” (Creswell, 2013, .43). The characteristics of qualitative activities include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. As a result, qualitative researcher study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research “begins with

assumptions and use of interpretive or theoretical frameworks that inform the study of problem addressing the meaning groups and individuals ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 43).

We conduct qualitative research because a problem or an issue needs to be explored or investigated. Creswell (2013), argued that this exploration is needed, because of a need to study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured or hear silenced voice. There are many approaches of qualitative research since it is designed to investigate or interpret a phenomenon in the field of social science. Below are the types of qualitative research used by researchers in addressing an inquiry:

Table 9
Types of Qualitative Research Methods

Source: Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Foundational Considerations	Narrative Research	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
Research Focus	Exploring the life of an individual	Understanding the essence of the experience	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a culture-sharing group or groups	Developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple case
Unit of analysis	Studying one or more individuals	Studying several individuals who have share the experience	Studying a process, an action, or an interaction involving many individuals	Studying a group that shares the same culture	Studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual

Type of research best suited for approach	Needing to tell a story or stories of individual experiences	Needing to describe the essence of a lived phenomenon	Grounding a theory in the views of participant	Describing and interpreting the shared patterns of a culture of a group	Promoting an in-depth understanding of a case or cases
Nature of disciplinary origins	Drawing from the humanities, including anthropology, literature, history, psychology and sociology	Drawing from philosophy, psychology and education	Drawing from sociology	Drawing from anthropology and sociology	Drawing from psychology, law, political science and medicine
Forms of data collection	Using primarily interviews and documents	Using primarily interviews with individuals, although documents, observation and art may be also be used	Using interviews with 20 to 60 individuals	Using primarily observations and interviews but perhaps collecting other sources during extended time in the field	Using multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents and artifacts
Strategies of data analysis	Analyzing data for stories, and developing themes, often using a chronology	Analyzing data for significant statements, meaning units, textural and structural descriptions and descriptions of the essence	Analyzing data through open coding, axial of coding, and selective coding	Analyzing data through descriptions of the culture-sharing group and themes about the group	Analyzing data through descriptions of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case theme

Summary

The objective of chapter three is describe to the readers and Dissertation Committee Members how the study was conducted; what sort of data was collected for the study; how the data was collected; how the data was analyzed; and which methodological approach the study will apply. The above descriptions clearly addressed how the key points implemented and in which chapter of the dissertation. In this chapter, the researcher explored other issues that were not addressed in the literature review by previous authors. For example, Issues such as cultural difference, transnationalism, and differences in educational systems between host country and the country of origin. The researcher also explored other policy changes that may be working at community colleges in the United States that these community colleges can subscribe to in dealing with the issues.

Chapter 4: Results

The primary focus of this phenomenological research is to examine the impact of studying away from one's home country. This chapter focuses specifically on what the researcher found after the data had been collected, coded, and analyzed. The focus of this study was experiences of international students at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. As such, a qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen in order to allow the participants to present their in-depth feelings, opinions, thoughts, and lived experiences in the form of narratives that give real meanings of their lives (Creswell, 2007). The literature review was divided into ten topics and subtopics such as introduction, difficulty with English proficiency, adjusting to cultural difference, inadequate social support network; cultural shock, financial constrain, language anxiety, voluntary migrants vs. students from refugee backgrounds, theoretical framework, and academic performance expectations.

To achieve this research objective, the researcher purposefully selected 20 international students from three community colleges in the Twin Cities as interviewees to participate in the research study. In this selection process, 60% of the international students selected were females and 40% were males. The researcher found the educational levels of the participants at associate degree; which was between one to two years at the community college. Unless other unforeseen circumstances, when some students might spend more time than one to two years. The age range of the participants were 25 to 45 years old; please see the actual break down of demographic in Appendix in Table #3. The researcher used an interview as the instrument for the data collection.

Using this instrument created an environment for the participants to freely express their opinions and thoughts on experiences they encountered as international students. For the interview questions, the researcher utilized open-ended interview questions to explore the lived experiences of the participants. To maintain accuracy and consistency, the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed as sources for research data collection (Rossman & Rallis 2017; Creswell, 2007).

The researcher was very careful of all ethical considerations during the interview process. As a result, the researcher documented all activities to ensure a constant reminder of objectivity that is free of bias in the process. To authenticate the narratives, the researcher conducted feedback with follow up communication with the participants. The selection of 20 participants was tedious and time consuming as expected in qualitative research. However, establishing personal relationships with both participants and staff at each institution prior to the data collection process was helpful as well as the enhancement of the data triangulation and trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007).

Table #10 (Table of Participants)

Participant's Number	Gender	Country of origin	College	Major	Level of education in U.S.	Years in the Twin Cities
P1	Female	Malawi	Anoka-Ramsey	Nursing	Pursuing AA Degree	2 years in the U.S.
P2	Female	The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	North Hennepin Community College	Construction Engineering	Pursuing AA Degree	Over a year

P3	Male	Peru	Century College	Still doing general courses	Pursuing AA Degree	Three years in the U.S.
P4	Male	Cameroun	Century College	Nursing	Pursing AA Degree	Over a year
P5	Male	Cameroun	Century College	Nursing	Pursuing AA Degree	Over a year
P6	Female	Vietnam	North Hennepin	Biology	Pursuing AA Degree	A year and a half at the college
P7	Female	Nigeria	North Hennepin	Pre-engineering	Pursuing AA Degree	Over a year at the college
P8	Female	Nigeria	Anoka-Ramsey	Pre-engineering	Pursuing AA Degree	Over a year at the college
P9	Male	Nigeria	Anoka-Ramsey Community College	Environmental Science	Pursuing AA Degree	One and a half year at the college
P10	Female	Liberia	North Hennepin	Biology	Pursuing AA Degree	Over a year at the college
P11	Male	Nigeria	North Hennepin	Computer Science	Pursuing AA Degree	One and a half year
P12	Male	Pakistan	Anoka-Ramsey	Exercise Science	Pursing AA Degree	One year at the college
P13	Female	Kenya	North Hennepin	Nurse	Pursuing AA Degree	Over ten year in the U.S.

P14	Male	Thailand	North Hennepin	Computer Science	Pursuing AA Degree	Two years in the U.S.
P15	Female	Nigeria	North Hennepin	Nursing	Pursuing AA Degree	One and two months at the college
P16	Female	Liberia	North Hennepin	Elementary Education	Pursuing AA Degree	Two years at the college
P17	Female	Nigeria	North Hennepin	Nursing	Pursuing AA Degree	One Semester at the college
P18	Female	Gambia	North Hennepin	Pre-Nursing	Pursuing AA Degree	First semester at the college
P19	Male	Nepal	North Hennepin	Nepal	Information Technology	Two and a half years in U.S.
P20	Male	Liberia	TBD	Liberia	Business major	Over twenty years in the U.S.

Introduction of Participants

It is always important to disclose the purpose of the study to the participants. In this section, the researcher sees confidentiality as one of the major ethical and moral considerations when conducting a research project. One of those considerations is the consent form for the participants, which should indicate that the study is voluntary and that it would not place the participants at undue risk (Creswell, 2013). With that in mind, the researcher assigned participants of this study by the letter “P” and their corresponding

participants during the data collection process. Consequently, the researcher labeled participants in the study by the letter as “P1” through P20 to protect their confidentiality; as required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures.

At this introductory stage, the researcher anticipated any cultural, religious, gender, or other differences such as tribe, etc. in the participants as well as the sites that need to be reported. The researcher was more sensitive to potential issues that may arise in the data collection process, especially the interviews and observation of participants. Therefore, the researcher was mindful to protect the participants’ privacy through names masking and developing composite profile and cases. Keeping that in mind, the researcher decided to assign the participants by the letter “P” and their respective participants. As a result, the participants were introduced as P1, P2, through P20.

P1 was a third semester international student from Malawi who at the time of the study live with her aunt. She is studying to be a nurse. P1 was at the time the study working towards an associate degree in nursing. However, she also hopes to continue to get a baccalaureate of science degree in nursing at a four-year traditional university. According to her, there is a bite of a problem getting employment off campus because of transportation. It was also difficult at the time of the study because there is no program to assist international students from the college. The hope of these international students is that the institution will pay close attention to these concerns with consideration to do something about it.

P2 was a second-year international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo studying construction engineering. As a francophone, English is their second

language. P2 planned to continue her study at a four-year traditional university upon graduation from the community college.

P3 was from the country of Peru, South America. P3 had been studying at Century College and in the United States as an international student for three years. His major was undetermined yet; however, he was finishing his general courses at the college.

P4 was an international student from Cameroon, Central Africa. He is studying nursing as a major. P4 had been at Century College for over a year but planned to further his studies at a four-year traditional university upon graduation.

P5 was also an international student from Cameroon, Central Africa. P5 was a nurse major. Like P4, P5 planned to further his studies after graduation from Century College. He had been enrolled as international student at Century for over a year.

P6 was an international student from Vietnam. She had been studying at North Hennepin Community College for four semesters majoring in biology. P6 also speaks English as a second language. She had been at North Hennepin Community College for over a year.

P7 was a pre-engineering major and an international student from Nigeria. She had been a student at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. P7 speaks English as a second language.

P8 was an international student from Nigeria. He was also a pre-engineering major at North Hennepin Community College. He was planning to further his education at a four-year traditional university upon graduation.

P9 was an international student from Nigeria at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He was studying Environmental Science as a major at the college. P9 had been a student for over a year as international student.

P10 is an international student from Liberia. She had been studying at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. P10 was a biology major but plans to transfer to a traditional four-year university to study medicine.

P11 had been studying at North Hennepin Community College for one and a half year. She was an international student from Nigeria. P11 was a computer science major.

P12 was an international student from Pakistan at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He had been a student at the college for one year. P12 was an exercise science major and planned to further his study upon graduation at Anoka-Ramsey Community College to a four-year traditional university.

P13 was from Kenya and has been a student at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. P13 was a nurse major, however, she planned to further her study at a four-year traditional university upon graduation. She had been in the United States for several years and still maintained her status as an international student.

P14 was an international student from Thailand. He had been a student in the United States for two years. P14 was also a computer science major and hopes to further his education upon graduation from North Hennepin to a four-year traditional university.

P15 was a second-year international student from Nigeria. She was a nursing major and had been at the college for one year and two months as an international student.

P16 was a second-year international student from Liberia. She was an elementary education major and in her second year as a student at North Hennepin Community College.

P17 was also a nursing major at North Hennepin Community College. She had been at the college for one semester. P17 was an international student from Nigeria.

P18 was a pre-nursing international student from the Gambia. She had been a student at the college for one semester. Her overall stay in the United States was less than a year.

P19 was an international student from Nepal. He had been a student at North Hennepin Community College for two and a half year. He was an information technology major.

P20 was an international student from Liberia. He was a Business major and had been living in the United States for at least twenty years.

Identification of Themes in the International Student Context

The researcher was mindful to distinguish between a code, category and a theme. “A code is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute to a portion of a data. Categories on the other hand are groupings of codes that represent some segments of the data that are relatively discrete variable” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017 p. 240). “Whereas a theme is a declarative phrase or sentence that describes a process, connection or an insight” (Rossman & Rallis, 2017 p. 240). “Categories provide direction for data gathering.

Themes in contrast, emerge as linkages, patterns, process and possible explanations that begins to appear within and across categories” ((Rossman & Rallis, 2017, p. 240).

The researcher described at least five or more lived experiences from participants in each theme to triangulate the data collection process during the interview. To bring about an in-depth knowledge about the perspectives of the narratives, using a triangulation was the primary strategy to collect multiple sources of data from multiple points of view in time from a variety of participants to build the picture the researcher was investigating (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). In a qualitative phenomenological research, it is important to collect data from each theme from different sources or participants with similar results. Triangulation helps to ensure that the researcher had not only studied fraction of the complexity he or she sought to understand. In the study, the researcher observed that all 20 participants consistently provided similar lived experiences on each theme. As international students, they all encountered or emphasized the challenges that constituted all the themes developed by the researcher during the interview activities.

The following themes were created as a result of the interviewing the participants:

Theme One: A Lack of Employment Opportunities for International Students

Throughout the data collection process, all 20 participants who were interviewed repeatedly emphasized the need for international students to have more employment opportunities both on campus and outside of the institutions in the community. All 20 participants expressed the need for more working hours as a mean to fully support themselves while studying here in the United States, specifically at their respective

colleges. Many of these international students indicated that financial issue was one of the major challenges they encountered due to a limited number of work hours.

P7 who was a pre engineering student at North Hennepin Community College from Nigeria indicated the following theme of a lack of employment opportunities for international students: “to me the need for more opportunities for international students to do things outside of campus, such as full-time employment, internship in their areas of specialization” p7.

P9 who was an environmental science major from Nigeria at Anoka-Ramsey Community College also asserted the following: “international students are not allowed to work outside of their college campus; primarily because of their status, which can cause a financial problem. Many of us support ourselves while going to school in the U.S. Sometimes with some financial support from families from our home countries” p9.

P19 is from Nepal, and an information technology major. When the interviewer asked what other burning issues that they had not talked about, he asserted the following: “it is critical for international students to be provided more employment opportunities both on campus and outside of campus in my opinion” p19.

P13 was an international student from Kenya, majoring in nursing. On this question of opportunities, she emphasized the following points: in addition to providing more employment opportunities for international students, I think the multicultural office should make much effort to reach out to international students; because it is this office that is the middle man between the students to promote the missions and programs of the

college. The Multicultural office should meet the social and cultural needs of all students” p13.

P16 was an elementary education major from Liberia. She had been an international student at North Hennepin Community College for two years. When asked by the interviewer on the issue of opportunities, she indicated: “I think helping international students with employment opportunity is a big need; especially getting job anywhere is very important because most of us are self-supported young adults. Without finance, we will not be successful academically” p16.

P10 was a biology major from Liberia. She had been an international student at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. She also planned to further her education upon completion of her program at NHCC to a four-year traditional university. When asked the question, what might be her burning issues, she asserted the following: I think the college should provide more employment opportunities for international students because it is necessary to have funds for the up keep with the day-to-day activities. Not having enough funds from the college in addition to limited work hours are part of the challenges” P10. Nearly all of the interviewees agreed that there is a need to increase the number of work hours from 20 to 25 or more hours per week.

Theme Two: Becoming Home Sick due to Loneliness

Becoming home sick due to loneliness was one of the themes consistently emphasized by all 20 of the participants interviewed during the data collection process. However, not all of the international students encountered the issue at the same level. A number of the participants indicated that they experienced the issue of being home sick

due to loneliness. Some experienced loneliness or isolation because of the workloads in school and at their day job in order to sustain themselves at the college. Some of the participants dealt with this theme differently than others. The following descriptions depict how each participant dealt with this theme while studying in the United States as part of their lived experiences.

P8 was a pre-engineering international student from Nigeria. When asked by the interviewer if becoming home sick due to cultural shock was an issue, P8 asserted the following: “yes, I had issues with cultural shock; most especially my accent. Being an international student, my pronunciation of words was obviously different and distinct. Another challenge was understanding the community. I dealt with the issue by making more friends, keeping myself busy such as reading, etc.” p8.

P9 was an environmental science major from Nigeria at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He asserted the following about if loneliness attributed to being home-sick: “sure, I felt lonely and missed home and my friends. I also missed my parents, siblings and other close relatives. How I dealt with this challenge is by watching lots movies, listening to songs that I am familiar with or go to church where most Africans go to” p9.

P10, was a biology major from Liberia at North Hennepin Community College expressed the following sentiments when asked if she felt home sick: “yes, I feel lonely because I have all my parents and friends and other relatives at home country. So, how do you deal with these issues? How do I deal with the challenge is by keeping in mind

my purpose for being here at North Hennepin Community College. That is what motivates me most is to focus on my study” p10.

P11 had been at North Hennepin Community College for one and half year as an international student. P11 a computer science major from Nigeria responded to the challenge of loneliness in the following ways: I did become lonely at first when I was new at the college, but as time went on, I began to make more friends. However, I still missed my family members at home. My affiliation with friends at the college helped to reduce the challenge of home sick and loneliness” p11.

P12 was an exercise science major, and an international student from Pakistan. He had been attending at Anoka-Ramsey Community College for over a year now. He described his lived experience with home sickness and loneliness in the following way: “sometimes I do feel lonely. For example, at my home country, it is lot easier to make friends; whereas, here in the United States, it is quick different how people do things. How do you deal with this challenge? “I deal with the challenge by focusing on myself and by keeping busy studying and working” p12.

Theme Three: Cultural Shock

P3 was an international student Century College from Peru. He had been in the United States and a student at the college for three years. He provided an interesting view in responding to the theme of cultural shock in the following way: “the challenges affecting my social life as an international student are meeting people who are from another country is a big challenge for a number of reasons. For example, the trust issue, cultural and language differences, and sometimes there may even be racial difference.

So, I deal with these challenges by keeping busy such as doing my schoolwork, or working hard, etc.” p3.

P18 was a pre-nursing major from the Gambia in her first semester at North Hennepin Community College. She had been living in the United States for less than a year as an international student. P18 described her challenge in the following way: “I experienced cultural shock in the areas of the English language, making friends, etc. One of the ways I deal with the issue is to have an open mind by talking to people. I also deal with been home sick by calling my parents and friends in my home country” p18.

P5 was an international student from Cameroon. He had been at Century College over a year. P5 was a nursing student and planned to continue to a four- year traditional university upon graduation. He described his lived experience on this theme by saying the following: “for me everything I have experienced here at this college and in this country is very different. Here, Americans are more into themselves compared to my home country. In the United States, there are issues of boundary, space, and how you communicate with one another. So, everyone is different; which to me is a cultural shock” p5.

P9 was an Environmental Science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He is from Nigeria and has been an international student at the college for over a year. He described his lived experience with cultural shock in the following way: “a few examples of my experience are seeing a new way of life, where everybody is for himself or herself. Other cultural shocks include food people eat, the weather (especially coming from a tropical part of the world), and the general process of socialization” p9.

P12 is an Exercise Science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He was an international student from Pakistan. P12 had been a student at the college for one year. He described his live experience with cultural shock in the following statements: “I noticed that people are different here; for example, different protocol in doing things and going about business, different cultural norms, personalities of people, diversities, etc. Therefore, it is difficult to even make friends” p12.

Theme Four: Financial Difficulties when away from Home Country

This theme was repeated several times during the interview process by ten of the participants. Studying away from one’s home country always puts one at a disadvantage whether financially or socially. This theme demonstrated that financial difficulties while studying overseas can be a recipe for distraction in school as indicated in the responses from the participants below:

P3 was an international student at Century College from Peru. He had been in the United States and student at the college for three years. He asserted an interesting view in responding to the theme of financial difficulties when away from home in the following way: “I think financial difficulties sometimes impact my focus in school; especially, when I have to work or wait on assistance from home. Those are other challenges which also affect my social and academic life as an international student. Like how people do things in general, totally different from where come from”p3.

P4 was a nursing major from Cameroon, Central Africa. As an international student, he expressed a key and central point that other participants interviewed also articulated. “For me the major challenge affecting my social life is finance. As an

international student, I am paying my tuition out of my pocket. This means I have to work very hard while at the same time trying to keep up my grade point average” p4.

P8 was a pre-engineering student from Nigeria at North Hennepin Community College. She had been attending at NHCC as an international student for over a year. P8 described the theme of financial difficulties while studying away from home country in the following way: “my challenge for example is tuition. As international student, I am only allowed to work part-time; which is 20 hours per week. This is very challenging socially and academically to manage everything I need to take care of” p8.

P12 was an Exercise Science major from Pakistan at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. He has been attending the college as international student for one year. On the theme, “financial difficulties when studying away from home” he noted: “obviously, financial issue is always the most critical challenge for me as international student. As international student, I do not get financial aid because of my status; therefore, everything comes from my pocket or my family” p12.

P19 was an information technology major at North Hennepin Community College. He was an international student from Nepal. P19 had been a student at NHCC for two and half years now. On the theme of financial difficulties when away from home, he noted: “for me finances have always been an issue; especially, when my parents would not send me money on time. However, this issue does not negatively impact my academic performance here at the college. I tried to be focused in the mix of all the difficulties” p19.

P17 was also from Nigeria and a nurse major at North Hennepin Community College. She had been a student at NHCC for one semester. On the theme of financial difficulties, the student described her lived experience in the following way: “as international students, we have or are required take full-time credit each semester because of our immigration status. This means taking twelve-credits a semester; which is full-time enrolling in the college. Consequently, this has an impact my financial problem. Additionally, as international student, my work hour is not enough to sustain me, so it is a challenge” p17.

Theme Five: Differences in Learning Styles

On this theme of differences in learning styles, all of the participants affirmed that there were some differences in the styles of learning when compared to their home countries. This theme was emphasized by all 20 participants interviewed in the study. The researcher also noted that these differences in learning styles were reasons why most international students applied for visas to study in the United States. Availability of resources in the United States was part of the reason for the differences in learning styles when compared to other countries, as emphasized by the participants.

P2 was an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo-(DRC) at North Hennepin Community College. P2 was a construction engineer major and had been at NHCC for over a year. In responding to this theme, she noted the following differences in learning and teaching styles: “the way teaching is done here at this college makes things easier compared to my home country. Take for example, it is very mandatory to use textbook here. In my experience, this makes test taken at the college

much easier. What is also easier to do is moving from class to class and scheduling process. Whereas in my home country, students mostly rely on memorization, which makes things at lot difficult due to lack of resources” p2.

P5 was from Cameroon, Central Africa at Century College. He was an international student majoring in nursing. In responding to differences in teaching and learning styles, the participant noted the following: “here in the United States, you receive exactly what to expect from the instructor; whereas, in my home country, there is much work for the student. At my home country there is much specificity on students. Students usually required to read every material given in class to be successful during testing. Personally, that is not a problem for me but that is the reality when comparing the learning and teaching styles” p5.

P6 was an international student from Vietnam at North Community College. She had been attending at NHCC for over a year and majoring in biology. On the theme learning and teaching differences, the participant asserted the following: “there are significant differences; for example, in Vietnam, there is more focus on theories and less focus on resources such as hand out and hands on trainings for students in my home country. Whereas, in the United States there are process” p6.

P7 was a pre-engineering international student from Nigeria at NHCC. Responding to the theme of differences in learning styles the participant noted, “it is arguable that here learning is better than my home country. A few examples are class size, grading system, and it is easier to reach instructors. Other examples are the methods of administering examinations; which is done periodically compared to my home

country. Other differences are socially related expensive that enhance the learning process; where you are on your own in meeting those needs” p7.

P8 who was also a pre-engineering major at NHCC from Nigeria noted the following: “there are more resources here at this college compared to my home country. Here in the United States, you get all the assistance you need; whereas, at my home country, you can only learn if you want to learn, in other words, students have to push themselves by looking for the resources they need to be successful in their learning endeavor” p8.

P15 was an international student majoring in nursing at NHCC. She had been a student at the college for one year and two months at the time of the interview. On this theme on learning differences, the participant noted: “there are a lot of differences. For example, back in my home country teaching is very direct; whereas here, students are encouraged to apply what they learn in the classroom. An example is the availability of syllabus provided to students which explains what to expect. When compare to my home country, those variables are unknown or done implicitly or obvious that students should know what to expectp15. Here the researcher observed the cultural differences; whereas in a high context culture, things are done implicitly vs the explicate nature of learning and teaching here in the United States.

P19 was an information technology major from Nepal. He had been at North Hennepin Community College for two and half years. On the theme of learning differences, he noted: “yes, there are lot of differences. In my country, there is a dress code in school and the learning is mainly focus on the text book rather than E-book

process in some cases here in the United States. In other words, students tend to learn the hard way with less reliance on technology. The focus is mostly on getting students to go through intellectual labor by using the physical textbook and class room assignments” p 19.

Theme Six: Academic Performance Expectation in the U.S.

This theme about expectations was considered and grounded in the literature review in previous studies by Oropeza and Fitzgibbon (1991), they stated that international students highly valued their academic performance and are very sensitive to the issue of academic performance.

All 20 participants agreed that there are indisputable academic performance expectations. In the interviews conducted, this theme was repeatedly expressed as part their lived experiences.

P9 was an international student from Nigeria. He was an environmental Science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. P9 had been a student at this college for over a year. He described his experience by noting the following: “expectations are sort of the same to me when it comes to the workload; however, in the United States, students are pushed to do better to be able to meet the expectations. Another difference is that in the U.S., there are more resources available to students. A few examples are computers, the internet, accessibility to instructors, etc.” p9.

P10 was a biology major from Liberia at North Hennepin community College (NHCC). She had been an international student at NHCC for over a year. On the theme of performance expectations, the participant noted: “there are more pressures to do well

academically at my home country than here in the United States. Part of the reasons is due to lack of resources to enhance students learning process. I am taking 16 credits this semester for example at this college; but it would have been much harder if I were at home in Liberia because of limited resources; whereas it is a bit laid back here” p10.

P2 was an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo at North Hennepin Community College. She had been a student at the college for over a year. P2 was a Construction Engineering major who planned to further her studies upon graduation. On the academic expectations theme, the participant asserted the following: “here at this college, it is much better; there is no rush. There is flexibility from the instructional staff; whereas, at home country, there is too much rush, which is totally opposite at this college” p2.

P20 was a business major from Liberia. On the theme of academic expectations, the participant noted the following: “for me the factor was my age. In my home country, I was single and much younger with less responsibility. As a result, my academic performance was great. Now in the United States, not only am I an international student, I also have a family (meaning, wife and children); those factors along with my age have created performance challenge for me academically. I also have to work full time to be able to support my family and to remain enrolled in school; I have to work hard to make payment of the tuition. All those factors constitute challenges that affect my academic performance expectations” p20.

Theme Seven: Difficulties with Learning at Home Country vs the U.S.

Two-thirds of the participants interviewed emphasized that they experienced some degree of difficulty learning the way things were done both at the colleges and in the community in the U.S. However, they described their experiences as mixed feelings due to the countries they come from. For example, the majority of the participants came from countries where people speak English as the official language of business. A few examples of those countries are Nigeria, Pakistan, The Gambia, Liberia, etc. Therefore, learning in English was not difficult, but there were other expectations in learning that were culturally different.

P2 was from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). She described her experiences with learning difficulties in the U.S. as well as her home country in the following way: “in my home country, it is difficult in other ways such as expectation to do well and sometimes lack of resources; those factors can be barriers to learning; but here in the United States, there are different types of difficulties. For example, from the beginning, it was difficult to communicate in class and with people as someone who is a French speaker. What helped me in dealing with this issue was taking an English Language Learner (ELL) class when I first moved to the Twin Cities to study as an international student; taking these classes early on was helpful. Other strategies that helped me to overcome the difficulties were reading and writing a lot in the English language. Living with American family and doing other activities that involve speaking English, which gave me some confidence to communicate with people” p2.

P14 was an international student from Thailand at North Hennepin Community College. He is a computer Science major. P14 had been attending at NHCC for two years now. On this theme of difficulties with learning, the participant noted the following: “communication is a challenge for me because the meanings of words can usually be confusing sometimes, both orally and in writing. However, I can say written communication is much easier for me when it comes to expressing myself than orally communicating with people. As time passed, I am learning to deal this issue by making more friends and engaging in outdoor activities on campus and in the community” p14.

P6 was an international student from Vietnam at North Hennepin Community College. She had been a student at this college for over a year. P6 was a biology major and planned to further her studies at a four-year traditional university upon graduation. She presented her view on the theme by stating the following: “sometimes I am not confident with my speaking skills, coming from another country where English is not the official language. However, I am very confident in my oral communication skills. Therefore, writing has become my strongest skill in communication” p6. P6 also worked at the college part time; which is helping her to mitigate some of the learning difficulties as an international student.

Comparing the difference with her home country, the participant from Vietnam noted that “it is also difficult to learn because of limited resources. Sometimes, students may be delayed for graduation when the necessary resources are not available for them to complete their requirements”. The point on limited resources in the schools was one of the key points emphasized by many of the participants as part of the difficulties to

learning in their home countries as compared to U.S. schools. P6 noted that “as international student, she believed she has made much improvement at NHCC because of the resources and other opportunities that the college has for all of its students whether they are international students or born here in the United States” p6.

Theme Eight: Communication Skill as Strength or Weakness

The researcher observed that this theme was emphasized on several occasions during the interview process by all 20 participants either a strength or as a weakness. Depending on which social and cultural stratus each participant came from, some considered communication skill a strength or a weakness. Some of the participants came from French countries while others were from English speaking countries. Other considered French or English as their first language while other spoke indigenous or native languages.

P2 was an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Coming from a French speaking country, the participant noted the following as a student at North Hennepin Community College: “from the beginning when I first enrolled, it was difficult to communicate in English fluently since French was my official language before coming to school in the United States. What helped me shed added, was taking the English Language Learner class to upgrade my communication skills. Other things that helped me were reading and writing in English a lot daily. For some time, I lived with American family which was very helpful in the development of my oral communication skills. Additionally, I also did other activities such as recreation and engaged in other social events with people in English” p2.

P4 was an international student from the Cameroon, Central Africa. He was a nurse major at Century College. P4 had been a student at the college for over a year but planned to further his education to a four-year university upon graduation. On this theme, the participant described his lived experience in the following way: “my challenge is communication in general; coming from a background where French and English are official languages of business. The participant noted, “for example, sometimes when communicating with people, I am not understood because of my accent due to the fact that you are from another culture. Communicating in English was a major challenge for me when I first came here. However, there has been some improvements, especially my written communication skills, which is my greatest asset. As time went by, my oral communication also became improved when interacting with people” p4.

P14 was an information technology major from Thailand. The participant had been at North Hennepin Community College for two years as international student. On this theme, the participant noted the following: “for me communication is a challenge; especially when it comes to maneuvering the meaning of words in English. Sometimes it is confusing to express my thoughts in English fluently since it is not my first language. When it comes to oral and written communication, I say writing is much easier for me to express myself. Orally, it is a work in progress” p14.

P15 was an international student from Nigeria at North Hennepin Community College. The participant had been attending the college for one year and two months at the time of the interview. P15 was a nurse major and planned to further her studies at a four-year university upon graduation. On this theme, the participant provided a contrast

by asserting the following: “for me communication is a plus because English is my first language; because I come from an educated family where both of my parents are college graduates. We also speak English frequently at home even though, we have a native language. However, I preferred written communication; which is my strongest asset academically” p15.

P19 was an international student from Nepal at North Hennepin Community College. P19 had been attending at this college for two and half years majoring in information technology (IT). He described his lived experience with learning difficulties by asserting the following: “I will say communication has been a challenge for me especially when communicating in writing. On the other hand, oral communication is becoming my strength when compare to my initial arrival in the United States. I have made a lot of improvement with my oral communication. Making friends is one of the reasons why such improvement has come about” p19.

P16 was an elementary education major from Liberia at North Hennepin Community College. The participant had been an international student at NHCC for two years. Responding to this theme, the participant asserted the following: “this was a problem for me initially, coming from another country. However, as time progresses, I made some improvements with my English language. One strategy that helped to improve my communication skills is by slowing down when I am speaking to people; especially people who are native born. I have also made friends and engaged in extra-curriculum activities both on and off campus in addition to keeping myself busy by reading more” p16.

P18 was an international student from the Gambia at North Hennepin Community College. The participant was a pre-nursing major and had been a student at the college for one semester at the time of the interview. Responding to the theme, the participant asserted: “yes, communication is a challenge for me. Communication is a problem because the words people used here are different. For example, names of things are quite different such as soda instead of soft drinks or pre instead of preparation, etc. However, written communication is a plus for me. Writing has made thing easier and in my academic work as well. It is easier to express myself in writing than speaking because of my accent; people sometimes have difficulties understanding me. There are also some difficulties for me on the other hand, sometimes I do have difficulties understanding other people; especially those with American accent. On many occasions, I will ask for clarifications or meaning phrase or statement made by people” p18.

Theme Nine: Speaking with Accent

This theme was emphasized consistently by all 20 participants as one of the challenges encountered as international students. In a qualitative phenomenological research study, the researcher explores a common phenomenon that participants have (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This theme was one of those themes that all participants interviewed shared in their narratives as international students. The participants provided narratives based on the experiences that were mostly embedded in their times living and going to school in the Twin Cities as international students. In the theme, the researcher observed that the phenomenon with accent was common among the

participants. Below are few examples of the experiences from some participants interviewed in the study.

P17 was an international student from Nigeria. She was a nurse major at North Hennepin community College. At the time of this interview, the participant was finishing her first semester at the college as an international student. About her lived experience in speaking with accent, the participant noted the following: “for me, one thing I see in general is the stereotyping of international students, especially on black people, religion, etc. All of these variables have impact on my participation and interacting with people. So speaking an accent can be a recipe for discrimination, stereotyping, and basic ignorance about the overall orientations of international students” p17.

P2 was a construction engineering major at North Hennepin Community College. This theme of speaking with accent was one of the participant’s major challenges, as an international student from a French speaking-country. She asserted the following about her lived experience with this theme: “from the beginning, it was difficult to communicate with people because of my accent. When you are not clearly understood communicating, it is difficult to get your point across. Consequently, it can cause problems with academic performance as well. How I dealt with the issue was reading and writing a lot in English, taking the English Language Learner classes, and constant involvement with American family friends, and other extra-curriculum activities in English in the community” p2.

P16 was from Liberia at North Hennepin Community College and an elementary education major. As an international student, the participant noted the following:

“speaking with an accent was a problem for me initially. However, I have made much progress or improved in my communication skill in the English language. In my country, speaking fast is a usual thing with most people. This makes matters even worse when you are speaking fast with an accent because people are trying to pick up meaning of the spoken words while at the same time listening to the speaker. The improvement with my accent and communication in general happened when I began to slow down in speaking to people. Listening to native born classmates when they speak has also helped to improve my accent and communication skills as I learned to clarify and write in detail by thinking for the audience. For example, does the person understand what I meant or what I am writing and the context in which I am writing” p16.

Theme Ten: English as a Second Language

About 12% of the international students interviewed speak English as a second language. This is not just in the United States. It is a phenomenon students who study abroad encountered throughout the world; not only with English but other languages such as French, German, Russian, or Chinese, once the language is their second language. In this research study, two-third of the participants interviewed noted that English was their second language. This challenge of speaking English as second language clearly answered part of the research questions about barriers and challenges to success as international students in the United States. However, the researcher also noted that this theme of speaking English as a second language was not an issue for some of the participants. Participants that came from countries where English is the official language of business did not consider English as a second language. Those participants who came

from families where their mother and father received western education, especially the United States, considered English as their first language; because these parents normally speak English at home.

P2 was an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at North Hennepin Community College. Coming from a French-speaking country, it was obvious that English was a second language and one of the barriers she encountered when she first moved to the United States. In her response to this theme, the participant noted the following: “for me adapting to speaking and reading in English sometimes was difficult because English was my second language. From the beginning, it was difficult to communicate in English. Attending the English Language Learner classes was extremely helpful. Consistent writing and reading in English was helpful for me to improve my communication skills in English” p2.

Additionally, the participant asserted the following: “I also spent some time living with American family when I first moved here. This was very helpful for me because normally, we would do different activities in the community while speaking in the English language. At school, I had American friends who took the same courses together; a process that helped me was having more interactions with other people who speak English. However, I still experienced some challenge when it comes to interpreting the meaning of thoughts and articulating my points of view in most cases. I have to think in French and then tried to convert that thought in the English language. Sometimes this phenomenon tends to work against my French upbringing and culture, especially when it comes to conceptualizing thoughts and making decisions”p2.

P3 was an international student from a Spanish-speaking country of Peru, South America. The participant is in his third year at Century College. He planned to further his study at a four-year traditional university upon graduation. Responding to this theme, the participant noted the following: “on the question of English as a second language, my biggest challenge was communicating my thoughts. This theme also had an impact on my academic performance. Coming from a Spanish-speaking background, I had a strong accent when I speak English; which it difficult for people to understand when I communicate. However, I am getting better by developing some skills and making improvements” p3.

P6 was from the country of Vietnam, South East Asia. The participant was an international student majoring in biology at North Hennepin Community College (NHCC). Responding to the theme of speaking English as a second language, the participant asserted the following: “sometimes I am too confident with my speaking skills; however, I am also confident with writing skills. This is my only strength when it comes communicating in English. I tend to express myself well when it comes to writing. As time passes, I am now making much improvement even in my oral communication” p6.

Theme Eleven: English is my First Language

A study by Wang et al., (2017) concluded that most international students who study in the United States came from non-English speaking countries. English is not the dominant language for most international students. While many of them learn English in their home countries, there are very few opportunities to speak English outside of the

classrooms. Additionally, the format in which these classes are taught are large and in lecture style teaching; this gives these international students inadequate time to practice their English-speaking skills (Wang et al., 2017). As a result, many international students cannot express themselves in spoken English and are thereby unwilling to communicate with Native English speakers. However, the researcher also found that some of the participants interviewed indicated that English was their first language. Some of the participants came from countries where English is spoken officially as a language of business. Others came from a family that is Western educated, so English was a daily language in the home.

P7 was an international student from Nigeria. The participant was a pre-engineering major at North Hennepin Community College and responded to this theme in the following way: “I am from a country that English is spoken officially as language of business. Additionally, my parents are Western educated; specifically, in the U.S. While we do speak our native language, we also speak English at home daily. In fact, English is spoken more frequently at home than the other language; so, I considered English as my first language because that is what I grew up hearing” p7.

P9 was also from Nigeria. The participant who is an environmental science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College noted the following in response to this theme: “I have no communication issues. Speaking English is an added volume for me because it is my first language of business and at home. My communication skills both oral and written are part of my strengths as an international student at this college” p9.

P11 was a computer science major from Nigeria. The participant was in his second year as an international student at North Hennepin Community College. In response to this theme, the participant noted: “English is my first language of communication; however, Yoruba is also my second or tribal language. My parents were educated in the West, so we normally speak English growing up and continue to do so at home. As Nigerians, we also do not forget our native language” p11.

P4 was an international student from Cameroon, Central Africa. Cameroon is a bi-lingual country where people are required to speak both French and English officially for business. The participant was a nurse major at Century College. In response to this theme, he asserted the following: “communicating in English has been an asset for me; especially when it comes to doing my academic work. At school in my home country, students are required to learn and speak English, so both languages are our daily languages of communication. For some of us from the Anglophone part of the country, it is even easier speaking English when you come from a family where both parents are Western educated” p4.

Theme Twelve: Differences with Performance Expectation

On this theme, the majority of the participants had similar responses regarding their experiences at the three colleges where the data was collected. Academic performance expectations for most of the international students depend on the regions or country the students come from. The researcher observed that it is culturally shameful to perform poorly coming from such a far distance. Let alone, the expectations of family

members and their country in general. Below are responses provided by each participant during the time of data collection about the differences with performance expectations.

P2 was a construction engineering major from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at North Hennepin Community College. On this theme, the participant noted: “Here, it is much better. There is no rush; there is flexibility, whereas, at my home country, there is no flexibility, too much rush on student with the academic work” p2.

P3 is an international student from Peru. The participant had been a student Century College for three years at the time of the interview. On the question of academic expectations, the participant noted: “There are less expectations here in the U.S. In my home country, you are expected to work harder” p3.

P4 was an international student from Cameroun. On this theme, the participant noted: “Expectations in the U.S. are different; there are more resources. Therefore, things are broken down or more simplified here in the U.S. than at my home country” p4.

P5 was also an international student from the Cameroun, Central Africa. On academic expectations, the participant noted: “Here, there are more expectations compared to my home country. At my home country, the system teaches students how to have independent thinking; whereas here in the U.S. students are taught to think critically and intellectually. Those are some of the differences in performance expectations” p5.

P6 was a biology major at North Hennepin Community College. The participant was Vietnam, Southeast Asia. On performance expectations, the participant noted: “Back home, I studied because I had to; whereas, here in the U.S., I studied because I want to. That to me are the major differences with academic work when comparing the

two”p6.This showed that there are more flexibilities in learning in the U.S., especially at the post- secondary levels than the participants’ home country.

P7 was a pre-engineering major at North Hennepin Community College. The participant was an international student from Nigeria at the college for over 2 years. In response to this theme, the participant noted: “performance expectation is different at my home country compare to the U.S. There is a need for self-discipline here compare to back home” p7.

P8 was also a pre-engineering major from Nigeria. The participant was an international student at North Hennepin Community College. On the question of academic performance, the participant described the experiences in the following way: “Back home it is much harder than here in the U.S. In the U.S., there are more resources. For example, at home, it is really difficult to reach your instructor compared to here. The participant also noted that part of the reasons is the fact that there are more resources in the U.S., instructors are reachable in the U.S. than back home”. At my home country, sometimes it takes days for instructors to return calls or respond to inquiry that students might have” p8.

P9 was an environmental science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. In his lived experience with academic expectations, the participant noted that expectations are the same. However, he noted that in the U.S., “students are pushed to do better to be able to meet those expectations. The participant also stated that there are more resources in the U.S. compared to home country” p9.

P10 was a biology major from Liberia. The participant had been an international student at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. On the question of performance expectations, the participant noted: “More pressures back home; whereas here at this college, it is a bit laid back for me. For example, I registered for 16 credit hours and it was harder than here; taking the same credit hours” p10.

P11 was a computer science major from Nigeria. The participant was an international student at North Hennepin Community College. At the time of this interview, the participant had been a student at the college for one and a half years. On this theme, he noted: “Here, students are not stressed too much; whereas, back home, it is much rigorous” p11.

P12 was an exercise science major from Pakistan. The participant has been an international student at Anoka-Ramsey College for one year at the time of the interview. On the topic of performance expectations, the participant noted: “Herein the U.S., expectations are much harder than my home country. Here, it is also time consuming compared to my home country. It is harder to get things done, etc. with other schedules at hand” p12.

P13 was an international student from Kenya. The participant is a nurse major attending at North Hennepin Community College. On the theme of performance expectations, the participant noted the following: “I think because this is a community college, they are very supportive compared to a four-year traditional university” p13.

P14 was a computer science major from Thailand attending at North Hennepin College. The participant had been at the college for two years. On this question, the

participant noted: “it is a bit harder in my home country compared to the U.S. when compared to my home country. Here in the U.S., there more resources; which makes a big difference” p14.

P15 was from Nigeria and a nurse major attending at North Hennepin Community College. On the performance expectations theme, the participant noted: “I think it is the same. Back home, it is mostly your grade point average (GPA). Here, resources make a difference in the U.S” p15.

P16 was an elementary education major from Liberia. The participant had been an international student at North Hennepin Community College for over a year. On theme of performance expectations, the participant noted: “instructors are more flexible and sort of in the middle in the U.S. compared to my home country. Flexibility such as allowing student to complete assignments and making time to have audience with them, among other things” p16.

P18 was a pre-nursing major at North Hennepin Community College. The participant was an international student from the Gambia. At the time of this interview, the participant had been at the college for one semester. On academic performance expectations, the participant noted: “Schooling is harder in the U.S. than back home. Even though, it is harder in the U.S., it is easier to pass here than back home” p18.

P19 was an information technology major from Nepal. The participant had been at North Hennepin Community College for two and a half years as international student. The participant noted following to this theme: “In the U.S., academic performance is

much better than my home country. As a result, my performance is really good here in the U.S” p19.

P20 was an international student from Liberia, West Africa. The participant did business as a major. The participant had been in the U.S. for over a decade at the time of this interview. On performance expectations, the participant noted: “In my home country, students take everything the teacher gives; whereas, in the U.S., students have to explore and the Liberian system makes students to work hard. Here in the U.S., Financial Aid was a "way-maker" for me, only when you have legal status; which is also connected to how well a student performs to meet performance expectations academically” p20.

Theme Thirteen: More Academic Resources

In academic work, having adequate or necessary resources is critical. During the interview, more than 15 participants indicated that studying in the U.S. is better than their home countries. In this last theme, nearly all of the participants except for a very few of the participants had similar conclusion that the U.S. has more resources to support academic work of students compared to their home countries. Comparatively, they preferred the U.S. system more than their countries of origin. Below are comments from participants.

P2 was an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo attending at North Hennepin Community College. The participant is a construction engineering major at the college. In response to this theme of more academic resources, the participant noted: “The way teaching is done here in the U.S. makes things easy; compared to being home. Example, using book, (very mandatory). Also, the manner in

which tests are given at the college is easier. Other academic benefits are the schedules development and the way students move from class to class. All this amounts to better resources than my home country” p2.

P3 is an international student from Peru, South America attending at Century College. The participant had been a student at Century College for over a year at the time of the interview. On the question of academic resources, the participant noted: “There are technology and other resources in the U.S. compared to my country of origin. Sometimes this is an issue, which impact my focus in school. Having limited resources can distract one’s focus, thereby negatively impacting performance. Therefore, it is critical to have the necessary resources in order to do well academically” p3.

P4 was a nursing major from Cameroun, attending at Central Africa at Century College. The participant noted on the theme of having more academic resources by noting the following: “Teaching style in the U.S. is more simplified compared to my home country, because of the availability of resources. However, typing on computer to complete my assignments is one challenge I had with the technology available to students at the college” p4.

P5 was also from the Cameroun attending at Century College. The participant was an international student who is studying nursing as a discipline. On the theme of more academic resources in the U.S., the participant noted: “Here, you receive exactly what to expect whereas, in my home country, students have to work much hard because of lack of resources. Personally, lack of resources is not a problem for me, but that is the reality” p5.

P6 was an international student majoring in biology at North Hennepin Community College. The participant is from Vietnam, Southeast Asia. When asked to comment on academic resources, the participant noted: “there is significant differences; for example, in Vietnam, there is more focus on theories and less resources like hands on trainings for students in my country. Whereas, here in the U.S., there are lot more resources to support academic work” p6.

P7 was a pre-engineering international student from Nigeria attending at North Hennepin Community College. On the theme of academic resources, the participant noted: “It is arguable that here in the U.S., things are better than back in my home country. Example, class size, grading system, easier to reach instructor, etc. Another example is the examination styles, which is giving test periodically. Other personal needs related to living expensive while attending school, you are own your own. Needs such as meeting up with your bills, those needs have connections to success in academic work” p7.

P8 was also a pre-engineering student from Nigeria attending at North Hennepin Community College. The participant noted the following on the theme of more resources: “There are more resources in the U.S. compared to my home country. Here in the U.S. you get all the help you need; whereas, at home, you learn if you want to learn” p8. The participant added.

P9 was an environmental science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. The participant noted: “There are lots of differences; examples, more resources like tutoring center, where students go for support. Financial issues on the other hand, can

create stress that impacts my academic success. Reason being lack of legal status as an international student, limiting the number of hours I am allowed to work on campus” p9. Even though, the issues of legal status may be out of control of community colleges. Those are issues that relate to the U.S. Government not local concerns.

P10 was a biology major from Liberia attending at North Hennepin Community College. At the time this interview, the participant had been enrolled at the college for over a year. On this theme of more resources, the participant noted: “There are differences, example, as a biology major, there is much better laboratory equipment and other resources that are not available at my home country. Those differences also included grading system here at the college; which is much more transparent. Financially, it is an issue but not all the time” p10.

P11 was an international student from Nigeria. At the time of the interview, the participant had been an international student at North Hennepin Community College for one and a half years. On this theme of more resources, the participant noted: “Here you have more space to breath. There is more flexibility; whereas, back home, the style of learning is rigorous. For financial, that is a non-issue for me” p11. Financial was a non-issue because more international students are either supported by their governments or their families.

P12 was an exercise science major from Pakistan. At the time of the interview, the participant was an international student at Anoka-Ramsey Community College for one year. On the theme of more resources, the participant noted: “Differences in learning and teaching styles. The principles are the same in term of content and styles; however,

there are more resources and motivations, therefore, students learn much better here in the U.S. Obviously, financial issues always served as one of the major challenges for me as an international student, because I do not get financial aid” p12. Financial aid is only awarded to U.S. citizens and foreign-born students with legal status.

P13 was from Kenya and attending at North Hennepin Community College. About this theme, the participant noted: “Even though, I maintained an international status, I grew up here in the United States. Therefore, I do not have any experience with lack of resources. With only 15 to 20 hours a week work on campus as international student, I was unable to acquire additional resources to support my academic program” p13.

P14 was from Thailand, Southeast Asia and attending at North Hennepin Community College. On the question or theme of resources, the participant noted: “I want to say that there are big differences. In Thailand, students don’t choose much; because the system in the part of the world provided limited opportunities for students whereas, in the U.S. you are given more choices and provided more free to have other options” p14.

P15 was a nurse major from Nigeria attending at North Hennepin Community College. At the time of the interview, the participant had been enrolled at the college for one year and two months as international student. Responding to this theme of more resources, the participant noted: “It is harder back home than in the U.S. However, there are lot of homework here compared to back home. Time management is part of my academic challenge. There are more resources in the U.S. compared to back home” p15.

P16 is an elementary education major from Liberia attending at North Hennepin Community College. The participant noted the following on the theme: “Learning style here in the U.S., you are forced to learn, technology is available, and other resources make things easier with learning in the U.S.” p16.

P18 was from the Gambia, West Africa. The participant was enrolled as international student at North Hennepin Community College at this time. The participant was a pre-nursing major at the college. At the time of the time of the interview, the participant had been enrolled at the college for one semester. On this theme, the participant noted: “Yes, there is a difference. Here in the U.S., you have to understand the concept; whereas back home, you have to memorize everything. In other words, things are comprehensive” p18.

P19 was an information technology major from Nepal. The participant had been a student at North Hennepin Community College for two and half years at the time this interview. On this theme, the participant noted: “Yes, there are a lot of differences. Most colleges in my country, there is a dress code. Also in my country, we focused mainly on actual book than E book in the U.S. For me financial is an issue when it comes to having resources even without the ones provided by the college; especially when my parent would not send me money on time. However, the financial issue does not impact my academic performance; despite the need for more resources in the U.S.” p19.

Table 11: (Themes and Participants)

	The me 1	The me 2	The me 3	The me 4	The me 5	The me 6	The me 7	The me 8	The me 9	The me 10	The me 11	The me 12	The me 13
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P 1	✓	✓											✓
P 2	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
P 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓		✓
P 4	.	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓
P 5	.		.		✓								
P 6	✓				✓		✓			✓			✓
P 7	✓				✓					.	✓	✓	
P 8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	.	.					✓	✓
P 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
P 10	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓						✓	✓
P 11	✓	✓			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
P 12	.			✓									✓
P 13	.	✓		✓								✓	
P 14	.	✓					✓	✓					✓
P 15	✓	✓			✓			✓			.	✓	✓
P 16	✓	✓						✓	✓		✓		✓
P 17	✓			✓				✓	✓			✓	✓
P 18	✓	✓	✓					✓			✓		✓
P 19	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓		✓	✓		✓
P 20	✓	✓				✓							

*The Researcher Noted Participants Lived Experiences with the following Themes
above.*

Below is the Descriptive Analysis of the Data from Table above:

- **Theme one:** (more employment opportunities for international students) = 12 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme two:** (becoming home sick due to loneliness) = 15 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme three:** (cultural shock) = 4 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme four:** (financial difficulties when away from home country) = 6 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme five:** (differences in learning styles) = 7 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme six:** (Academic performance expectation in the U.S) = 4 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme seven:** (difficulties with learning at home country Vs the U.S.) = 3 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme eight:** (communications skill as strength or weakness) = 3 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme nine:** Speaking with Accent
- **Theme Ten:** (English as my second language) = 9 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme eleven:** (English as my first language) = 8 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.

- **Theme twelve:** (differences with performance expectations) = 8 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.
- **Theme thirteen:** (more academic resources in the U.S.) = 20 participants identified with this theme as part of their lived experiences.

Summary

The participants provided in depth feelings and opinions about their lived experiences as international students at the three community colleges. While there are similarities in their stories, there were few participants in the study who had different responses on some of the questions; depending on which country and family the students are from. A few examples are questions relating to communication skills, the feeling of home sick and loneliness, financial issues, academic expectations and learning styles differences. The majority of the participants interviewed were from North Hennepin Community College where the population of international students is larger. Similarly, the region they come from was a factor. The majority of the students who participated in the study came from Nigeria.

As a result of the participants' stories, 13 themes were developed by the researcher. The themes helped to bring meaning to the stories provided by the participants. The themes also provided consistencies and commonalities to the lived experiences of the participants. The themes developed by the researcher were found to be consistent to what was reported in previous studies. This finding essentially made a contributed to the body of knowledge in the field by enhancing the trustworthiness and dependability of the study. It enhances the richness of discussion and recommendations

in chapter five. The themes also helped to form a table which indicates how each participant responded to the interview questions. In this chapter, the research questions were answered by addressing the issues raised in the literature review and the inquiry developed by the researcher.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

Chapter five began with two research questions post by the researcher getting into the discussion and interpretation of results and how the study is tied to the literature. The researcher found that the questions were answered after the study was conducted. Below are the two research questions:

Research Questions

- **What are the experiences of international students at Midwestern community colleges?** The researcher found that international students experienced countless challenges while studying here in the Twin Cities. Among the challenges are lack of social support, becoming home sick, financial difficulties, cultural differences, and lack of employment opportunities. These results from data collected were also consistent with what was reported in previous studies.
- **What barriers and challenges do international students encounter at Midwestern community colleges?** Unlike the experiences, barriers and challenges included variables such as discrimination and implicit bias on international students who speak with an accent, stereotyping, adapting to other phenomenon like adjusting to socialization or American way of life, weather, food, and dealing with academic performance expectations as foreign-born students.

This phenomenological research explored the lived experiences of international students studying at three community colleges in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. The

researcher found consistency to what previous studies have found to the description of lived experiences of international students in the current study. Participants interviewed in the study provided in-depth narratives of experiences that were consistent with what international students encountered reported in previous studies. However, there were some gaps the researcher found in the current study that were not reported in previous studies. Those gaps were part of the researcher's summary and recommendations in this chapter. Some of the key themes reported during the data collection process included the following below:

Lack of Employment Opportunities for International Students:

This theme was found to be one of the major challenges identified by participants interviewed in the study. However, the researcher found more consistencies to what was reported in previous studies and this current study.

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Office:

F-1 students were prohibited from working off-campus during their first academic year but may accept on-campus employment subject to certain conditions and restrictions, because of their status. The policy further required international students to work off-campus after their first academic year. This off-campus employment policy must be related to their field of study, (Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, 1992, p. 6).

The 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 required that every applicant must have a social security number in order to apply for federal student financial aid. Concern over costs for completing a college education in the U.S. may

distract an international student from pursuing his or her academic goals. According to a report of International Student of the East Tennessee State University, the International Students Merit Scholarship covers only half of in-and out-of-state tuition and maintenance fees; with no additional fees or costs covered. According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Office, “F-1 students are prohibited from working off-campus during their first academic year; but may accept on-campus employment subject to certain conditions and restrictions. The policy further required international students to work off-campus after their first academic year. This off-campus employment must be similar to their field of study (Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, 1992).

Academic Life

One of the themes consistent with previous studies was challenges with academic life. It talks about variables that served as challenges in the academic lives of international students while studying away from home. A study by Lee and Rice (2007), found several consistencies in the kinds of experiences encountered by foreign-born nationals. The expected barriers and challenges this study uncovered included difficulties with speaking English as a second language; cultural differences; different styles of learning; financial struggles; the sense of belonging on college campuses and in the community; and unemployment. All of which are due to lack of legal status, perception of discrimination, especially, after the September eleven World Trade Center attack in New York City (Lee & Rice 2007).

A study by Lee and Rice, (2007) found the following:

That these difficulties have resulted in disadvantaging institutional policies, hostility toward cultural attributes such as language barriers and foreign accents, and the negative stereotyping of whole nations or cultures, all of which hinder intercultural diplomacy and friendships and obstruct intellectual growth; which can ultimately undermine the outcome of exchange. (p. 405)

This finding has a direct impact on the academic lives of international students and their abilities to be successful. Students coming to the United States may encounter difficulties beginning as early as obtaining permission to pursue education (Lee & Rice, 2007). Immigration regulations and interviews have become burdensome enough to discourage students from applying to U.S. institutions (Altbach, 2004). Those that persist have encountered mounting fees and delays since 9/11, which has diminished their chances of filling the university seats they were offered; in addition, some who have their visa denied are blocked from enrollment. Words of such experiences move quickly among population of prospective international students who weigh the time and resources spent in seeking entrance to the United States against the less onerous regulations of other countries such as Canada and Australia (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Becoming Home Sick due to Loneliness

During the data collection process that researcher observed that half of the participants described being away from family as some of their major challenges. This describes what international students encountered in the U.S. For example, the feeling of isolation, loneliness, lack of social support, etc. On this particular theme, previous studies reported similar experiences with other international students as indicated by

Kwadzo in the 2014 report. The first years for international students can be stressful in their host country. The challenge of leaving one's own culture to learn and adjust to new norms and values can sometimes be exciting and rewarding to these students. Many of the study participants in Furnham's and Bochner's study not only reported experiencing challenges from their dual role of studying and working but also encountered stress in their new environment. Some of them recalled feelings of homesickness after their arrival in the United States. One male student from Malaysia report feelings homesick due to changes in the weather. Commenting on his feelings, he noted the following: "Within one week it was snowing, raining, and sunshine" (Kwadzo, 2014, p. 286).

Another female student also commented:

Everything in the U.S. is cultural shock, I feel lonely. I see unfamiliar people and things. These things make me feel homesick. I see things I am not used to seeing. I cannot help and this makes me feel homesick (Kwadzo, 2014, p. 286).

Cultural Shock

This theme is about encountering any number of variables such as the weather, food, the norms of American society, differences in the styles of learning and teaching, and socialization of the American people in general. In the interview, many international students described their lived experiences with cultural shock; which was consistent with what was found in previous studies. International students and students from refugee backgrounds may also experience cultural shock and other challenges such as being away from families, and lack of social support while adapting in the host country. The process of cultural adjustment is a struggle for lots of foreign-born students. One study found

that Chinese International students, especially those who are recent arrivals in the United States, have many similarities with other international students (Ching, Renes, McMurrow, Simpson, & Strange, 2017).

Another study by Wilton and Constantine (2003) found similarities with international students on length of stay in the U.S., cultural adjustment difficulties, and psychological distress in sample populations of Asian and Latin American students attending college in the United States. The researcher found that the experiences were similar for anyone from another country living the United States whether you are a student, a visitor or voluntary immigrants who is living here. As described in previous studies, the process of adjustment is and can be real struggles for any foreign-born including international students who attend colleges and universities in the United States.

Academic Performance Expectation in the U.S.

This theme referred to the degree of expectations required by international students at colleges and universities in the U. S. compared to leaning at home countries. The literature by Oropeza and Fitzbbon also supports the argument about academic performance expectations. International students highly valued their academic performance; and are very sensitive to the issues of academic performance (Oropeza & Fitzgibbon, 1991). This theme was also consistent with what the researcher found during the data collection process. Many international students believed that making low grade is totally unacceptable, because of the high expectations they had on themselves in learning. Due to the high expectations many participants had from their home countries, it is normal for them to always work hard to meet up with that expectations.

Such expectations related to academic performance are among the main stressors affecting most international students' adaptation process according to a study by Oropeza and Fitzgibbon (1991). Most of the international students studying at U.S. colleges and universities are supported by family members. This raised a high expectations on international students to do well academically. In order to maintain the source of support they have to please the source of the support. Culturally, it can be a shameful situation to travel such a far distance and do poorly academically. In many cultures, especially international students who are from Africa, Asia and Latin America, that would be considered a disgrace to the family or the country from which they came. The same sentiment was found to be true in a study by Oropeza and Fitzgibbon (1991).

Communication Skills as Strength or Weakness

This theme was also found to be similar with Studies conducted by Sharma (2008), which dealt with the strength and weakness of international students studying at colleges and universities in the U.S. During the researcher's interview section with the participants, more than 60% reported that communication was limitation in their process. This was consistent with a study by Sharma (2008), especially when it comes to oral communication. Communication skills in this case referred to the ability to speak fluently as well as write well. Having the knowledge and skills to communicate orally is one of the major barriers face by international students and students from refugee backgrounds studying at community colleges in the United States (Sharma, 2008). Oral communication, at its most basic level, refers to the spoken and stress interaction between people (Sharma, 2008). The Sharma study also argues that several factors affect one's

ability to be able to have oral communication with people such as grammatical knowledge of the language, social, and cultural knowledge of the people who speak the language and having speaking skills. Accordingly, grammatical knowledge refers to one's understanding of the grammar, vocabulary, sounds of letters and syllables, pronunciation of words, intonations, and stress (Rutherford, 2014).

Secondly, English is not the dominant language for most international students and students from refugee backgrounds. While many of them learn English in their home countries, there are very few opportunities to speak English outside of the classrooms. Additionally, the format in which these classes are taught is large and in lecture style teaching, giving the students inadequate time to practice their English-speaking skills (Wang et al., 2017). As a result, many international students cannot express themselves in spoken English and are thereby unwilling to communicate with Native English Speakers. "The unwillingness serves as one of the major barriers for international students and students from refugee backgrounds because it limits them opportunity to produce English output in an authentic context. Subsequently, such barrier impedes their English acquisition" (Wang et al., 2017, p. 560).

The researcher used a qualitative phenomenological research design because of the commonality of participants' knowledge and insights of lived experiences with learning in their home countries and in the United States as international students. The researcher also purposed to ensure that the sample participants in the study come from different countries to enhance data trustworthiness and dependability. By triangulating multiple sources of data, at multiple points in time, a variety of sources were utilized by

the researcher. This method of collecting data ensured justification to build a credibility for investigating qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This process helped to ensure that the researcher has not only studied fraction of the complexity in collecting data. Instead it also showed that the researcher intended to be clear and well understood in the study. The researcher was mindful to present a study that is trustworthy as well as has integrity. Rossman and Rallis (2017) argued that “a study must be credible to potential users, whether these are other researchers, policy makers, practitioners, or the participant themselves” (p. 50).

The researcher is findings were consistent with conclusions noted in the literature review on barriers and challenges were discussed. During the data collection process, the researcher observed that participants described similar experiences that were discussed in the (Wang et al., 2017). For example, nearly all participants in the study experienced cultural shock, social isolation or being lonely due to being away from their home countries, etc. Some of the international students’ assertions confirmed what was observed in the literature review. However, there were different levels in which the students encountered challenges. One of the gaps noted between studies by Wang et al., 2017, and what the researcher found in the current study such as opportunities for employment; especially full time employment. In the literature review, this particular issue of employment opportunities was not discussed in the literature. This issues was discussed in detail in the section labeled as drawing the contrast or gap by the researcher in chapter five.

Key Terms in Research Questions on Barriers and Challenges with Learning from Home Country

In order to address the research questions about the challenges and barriers encountered by the participants, the researcher made a tremendous effort to explore what life was for the participants in their home countries; especially when it came to learning. The data collected on this theme showed similarities with the participants. All 20 of the participants interviewed emphasized that it was far better learning in the United States compared to their home countries. Part of the reasons was due to the availability to resources in the U.S. compared to their home countries. As one participant noted: “back home, I studied because I have to in order to make it; whereas, in the United States, I study because I want to” P6.

The researcher also found that participants in the study preferred the learning experiences in the United States over those in their home countries. Other examples provided by the participants include, flexibility of class schedules, getting access to instructors, critical thinking skills, availability to technology, and more. However, there were a few contrasts in the findings where some of the participants noted that studying in the United States is a lot harder. When asked how it was harder, they said that the academic workload along with taking care of other social needs were more difficult.

On the other hand, some participants indicated that in their home countries, one does not have to necessarily worry about paying rent or even have a need to buy food because you have family members to take care of those responsibilities. Some indicated that learning is difficult in their home countries because of limited resources and different

styles of teaching; which sometime makes it difficult for students to learn critical thinking skills. Some participants described their learning experience in their home countries as mostly memorization of the materials. On barriers and challenges to learning in home countries, the researcher reported that there was lack of resources such as technology, flexibility of instructors to be accessible to students, flexibility with class schedules, and critical thinking skills. These were some differentiations described by the participants when comparing the educational experiences in their home countries to the U.S. educational systems. At the same time, those barriers and challenges exist in one form or the other with all of the participants.

Barriers and Challenges with Learning as International Students

Academic Life

The researcher found consistency with barriers and challenges in learning of international students studying in the United States as discussed in studies by Earnest et al., (2010). For example, in the literature review, the Earnest et al., (2010) reported that international students from African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries encountered challenges such as feeling isolated or (feeling lonely), anxiety and depression, cultural shocks, lack of social support, differences in performance expectations, financial constraints, lack of gainful employment opportunities and social and cultural support issues. The same studies by (Earnest et al., 2010) also indicated that international students interviewed in the study reported that current support systems and programs at these three Australian colleges and universities were inadequate or non-existent. Another qualitative research also indicated that many of the international

students felt disadvantaged compared to their native-born student counterparts (Tung, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2013). Similarly, this researcher observed that participants interviewed in this phenomenological study confirmed that international students have encountered or experienced barriers and challenges at the three community colleges where the study was conducted in the Twin Cities.

Many international students have had countless experiences noted by the researcher. Some of the other barriers include such issues as difficulties with English proficiency, which is one of the stressors or challenges and adjusting to cultural differences of various degrees when it is not properly addressed. On the other hand, the researcher noted that there were other inadequate social barriers described by the participants such as feeling home sick, tougher government regulations, insufficient social systems that fostered or inhibited the adjustment process of the students, financial problems, and family problems. Financial challenges were one of the major challenges for international students (Tung, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2013).

In the same study by (Tung, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2013), the authors described the experiences of Iraqi students who choose to complete their degree in the U.S. A study by Hammed (2014) found that tuition, books, and other associated fees; may present a dire challenge to this population. Even to obtain a visa, these students must document their ability to pay tuition, room, board and fees (Dorsey, 2012). These results were consistent with experiences of international students at the three community colleges where the researcher's data was collected. The researcher also noted in this current study, that participants experienced the same barriers and challenges discussed in the

Dorsey (2012) study. The findings also showed that “despite these cultural, social, linguistic, and economic experiences international students continue to flock in North American universities; particularly U.S. and Canadian universities” (Yin, 2013, p.139). Part of the reason that international students continue to flock in North American colleges and universities, especially in the U.S. is the quality of post-secondary education. The researcher found this assertion articulated by many of the participants during the data collection process. Some talked about the resources and hands on nature of the instructional practice; despite the difficulties specifically for students with “F-1, F-2, J-2 and G-series visa who must have enough resources to meet their expenses throughout their stay” (Yin, 2013, p.5). As international students, they do not qualify for financial aid; according to the policies of U.S. Department Education, only U.S. citizens and eligible non-citizens may receive federal student financial aid.

Other conclusions of this study that were consistent to experiences that many international students encountered in the Dorsey (2012) and Yin (2013) studies was the format in which classes were taught. Another study by Wang et al., (2017) discussed that class size and style of teaching were different; giving these international students inadequate time to practice their English- speaking skills. Data collected from this study also discovered similar experiences with participants interviewed in the study. As a result of inadequate time to practice, some international students cannot express themselves in spoken English fluently and are thereby unwilling to communicate with native English speakers. “This unwillingness to communicate serves as one of the major

barriers or challenges international students encountered because it limits their opportunity to produce English output in an authentic context” (Yin, 2013, p.6)

Another social barrier was insufficient cultural knowledge of America. This lack of cultural knowledge sometimes led to the unwillingness for international students to communicate with Americans whether on college campus or out in the community. During the data collection of international students in the Twin Cities, the researcher reported that students described similar experiences. In a study by Wang et al., (2017), reported in the literature review, the writers also discussed that international students; especially Asian students were found to have encountered these types of challenges. “These experiences of fear and anxiety in speaking English prevent international students from communicating with native English speakers. Subsequently, such barriers impede their English acquisition” (Yang et al., 2017, p. 560). These same sentiments were expressed by international students who participated in the current study. Some of the challenges included language barriers, financial constraints, social isolations and alienations, second language anxiety, and performance expectations, among others.

Drawing Contrasts from Previous Studies

The researcher found some contrasts in the data collected from the participants during the interviews. Some of these challenges were not adequately discussed in the literature review. As a result, aspect of the challenges and barriers international students encountered while living here in the United States were not fully covered or discussed in the literature review as a full story of the participants’ lived experiences. A few examples were limited working hours on campus as international students and inability to work off

campus. When the researcher asked the participants about the limited work hours of 15 to 20 per week, all 20 of the participants interviewed said they could not work beyond those hours because of their legal status. Due to the legal status as international students, they are only limited to certain number of hours to work as required by the United States immigration policy.

The second issue that was noted by the researcher during the data collection process were lack of other opportunities such as internships, job training, and more especially for those in the medical or technical fields. The researcher noted that these issues were not discussed in previous studies. However, there were similarities to other barriers and challenges to success discussed in the literature review. The researcher hopes that future researchers will use these additional findings as tools to enhance the trustworthiness and dependability of their research objectives. These contrast with the literature review may also be due to research methodology during data collection, or any number of variables such as location, participant's age, and changes in U.S. Immigration policy after September 11th attack.

Limitations

The study was a non-random small sample (n=20); which was a convenience sample. The study was limited to 20 international students studying at three community colleges. Additionally, the study was done at one geographical location in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. The unique experiences of 20 international students might not represent all methods available to all international students in the U.S. to describe the barriers and challenges other foreign-born students encountered in the United States.

This study did not include barriers and other issues the foreign-born students encounter in the k-12 educational environment since the focus of the study is on post-secondary education. The researcher realized that this study did not cover all community colleges or traditional four-year institutions in the United States. While there may be similarities with students in k-12 and other institutions at which refugee and international students are enrolled, the specific dynamic for each population may vary given the intensity and anxiety levels that these international students encountered in the tertiary education system in the United States.

This study focused primarily on three community colleges in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/Saint Paul, Minnesota. Therefore, the data might not have reflected the issues that foreign-born students encounter in the other parts of the country.

Additionally, the sample size of 20 is limited to a small number of international students at three community colleges. The study was also limited in part because the sample was skewed towards African, Middle Eastern, Asian, and Latin American students; regions where the international students in the study live. The researcher did not interview international students from Europe, Australia, and other parts of the world. Therefore, findings may not be transferable or generalizable to other situations or cases.

Summary

This qualitative research study represents an investigation of the research questions on the barriers and challenges of international students studying at three community colleges in the Twin Cities. Due to the nature of the research questions, a phenomenological approach, which is one type of qualitative research, was considered

and utilized by the researcher. As discussed in chapter four, narratives provided through in-depth interviews of the participants were tape recorded, coded, analyzed and transcribed with no changes to the meaning and expressions of the participants.

During the analysis process of the data, the researcher created meaningful list of the themes in the narratives given by the participants. This process of theme creation and data collection provide readers a sense of direction and meaning making. The creation of themes also guided the researcher with detailed descriptions of the participant's stories. In some cases, during the data collection process, exact quotes from the participants were provided in the transcription to provide readers a deeper understanding of the thought process and expression of the lived experiences of the participants. While themes created from the data were common for most of the participants, some of the participants clearly had different experiences given the cultures and countries where they came from.

For the purpose of researcher triangulation, the researcher made a tremendous effort to include a broad spectrum of international students from 20 different countries in the Twin Cities. Consequently, the 20 participants were purposefully selected from three continents and the Middle East which is located between Africa, Europe, Central Asia, and South Asia; given the data collection process of the study a diverse structure.

Recommendations for Further Research for Community Colleges in the Twin Cities of Minnesota:

The research topic of barriers to success involving international students described narratives provided by participants' lived experiences in the Twin Cities. The data collected comprised of in-depth descriptions' of participants experiences. In consistent with what has been reported in the studies by Yang et al., 2017, the researcher recommends several strategies to help international students cope with these challenges. A few of these strategies include:

Recommendation One

Accommodation related to various student services, especially those provided by the international student offices and counseling centers and social support groups and activities on campus to promote relationships with people from host culture are some of the strategies suggested in the literature to help deal with such cultural stress.

Recommendation Two

The researcher is also recommending that further research studies with larger samples on the this topic to further explore and examine the type of barriers and challenges encountered by international students in the United States would be necessary; especially at community colleges, which is the focus of this study.

Recommendation Three

The researcher would also recommend that further studies be conducted on international students from other countries that were not covered in this study. Every region of the world has its own challenges and cultural orientations. Doing a more

comprehensive study that includes different parts of the world could provide an understanding of the challenges that were covered in this study.

Recommendation Four

Finally, the researcher recommends that further studies be conducted on international students at educational levels such 4-year colleges and graduate programs to examine if similar experiences are happening at these levels.

Recommendation Five

As the U.S. continues to experience an influx of people from other countries, many of whom are coming to further their education, it is imperative to understand the social dynamic of these new arrivals and their challenges be it cultural, social, financial, or academic. Such research will not only contribute to the body of knowledge in the field but also assist colleges and universities to deal with this emerging population. Previous studies by Yeh and Inose et al., (2003) have shown that international students have contributed tremendously upon graduation to their home countries as well as here in the U.S. economy. A study by Cheung and Xu (2015) indicated that international students who choose to stay in the U.S. upon graduation, are normally hired by major American firms because of their skills, especially those in the technical areas.

On the other hand, those who returned to their home countries served as valuable assets to those societies from where they come. A study done by Cheung and Xu (2015) examined the intention to return to home country for mainland Chinese students at elite

universities in the United States. It indicated that students studying at prestigious American universities tend to have a two-way push and pull model on the phenomenon. This phenomenon has to do with the number of international student who stay in the United States vs those who made the decision to return to their home countries. This phenomenon is not only with Chinese students studying in the U.S. but students from other parts of the world such as Africa, South American, and the Middle East. This two-way push and pull model has a direct economic impact to this study. This phenomenon is especially obvious for international students studying at prestigious American universities.

The result of the Cheung and Xu (2015) studies highlighted several aspects relating to the choices International students make after graduation. The finding confirmed a long-held concern regarding the low rate of international students who return from overseas study. Unlike their counterparts who study at mid-ranking universities, the mainland international Chinese students who study at elite U.S. universities are more likely to get job offers upon graduation (Cheung & Xu, 2015). In addition to the low rate of those international students returning to their home countries, the United States has a long-standing tendency to absorb foreign-born talents and professionals in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics due to a severe shortage of candidates (Society for Human Resource Management, 2011 as cited in Cheung & Xu, 2015).

Zweig, Fung, and Han (2008) also agreed with these findings that after these international students finish their studies, they often times tend to permanently stay after obtaining suitable jobs, starting their families, and begin to enjoy their careers in the United States.

The findings from the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) study also suggest that academic and economic factors have a greater deterrent effect on the return intention than political, social, or cultural factors. The findings in the SHRM study is similar and consistent with other studies done by Cheung and & Xu, (2015) on refugee international students who are studied in the United States, whether elite or mid-rank universities. The choice to return or not to return was also common among other international students from Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Due to the above argument, it is vital for further research on this topic to assist colleges and universities to pay close attention to what international students are offering after graduation, especially in the United States. It adds volume to the economic well-being not only to where these students come from, but also to the U.S. economy.

Recommendation Six

The researcher would also recommend that further scholastic studies that broadens or highlights the cultural variabilities of students from other parts of the world be considered because of limited details on this part of the study. Another recommendation is to encourage American counterparts, professors, and every person who interacts with these international students to remain open and flexible to embrace international students. According to a study done by Contreras-Aguirre and Gonzalez, (2016), international students who participated in the study, by being open and flexible, it will enhance the process of adapting to the American culture easier and ensure their academic success.

The researcher believes further research on this topic will help to bring more awareness about the challenges international students encountered while studying in the United States. Further studies will also create a better understanding of the social dynamic of this ever-increasing population in higher education in the U.S. Findings from this research will serve as valuable resource or tool to improve the educational experience of international student in the United States.

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APPENDIX A

List of Questionnaires or Interview Guide

Thank you for accepting my request to participate in this interview. As required by the University of Saint Thomas, all ethical guidelines by the Institutional Review Board will be observed. You are welcome to end the interview anytime you feel uncomfortable with the content of the questions and discussion. This interview will take no more than 25 minutes. However, we may go beyond that time limit if you are willing to provide additional information for any follow up questions the researcher might have.

- What are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?
- Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?
- Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?
- If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?
- Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?
- Please explain your experiences
- What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

- Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?
- Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student? (a) If so, how has your financial issues affect your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?
- How do you see academic performance expectations at this college? Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country? If they are different, how are they different?
- What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?
- How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?
- Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?
- What sort of issues have you experienced?
- What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compared to other students studying at your institution?
- How can this community college improve your academic success as international students?

Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- If so, what are they?

I want to thank you once again for your willingness to participate in this study.

APPENDIX B

In the introduction of the dissertation there are the background of the problem which provides information about the history of the problem; the problem statement that explains the actual problem; the purpose of the statement that provides the central phenomenon; the research questions that is derived from the purpose statement; and other relevant parts of chapter one (Terrell, 2016).

Terrell (2012) explained that there are six characteristics of a good problem:

- The problem is interesting to the researcher.
- The scope of the problem is manageable by the researcher.
- The researcher has the knowledge, time, and resources needed to investigate the problem.
- The problem can be researched through the collection and analysis of data.
- Investigating the problem has theoretical and practical significance.
- It is ethical to investigate the problem.

The author provided three things to consider in conceptualizing a problem:

- “Don’t try to investigate all the world’s problems.
- Don’t try to investigate some of the world’s problems.
- But rather investigate one problem” (p. 10).

Terrell, (2016) provided the following excerpts as a summary for Chapter one below:

“understanding and clearly stating the problem you are investigating is the first step in writing a good proposal. Keep in mind, he argued while formulating a good problem statement, you (the researcher) must ensure you meet the following criteria:

- The researcher must be interested in the problem you are investigating.
- The scope of the problem you want to investigate must be manageable.
- The researcher must be comfortable in terms of the knowledge, time, and resources necessary for the researcher to investigate the problem.
- The researcher must be able to collect and analyze the data.
- There must be a practical and theoretical reason for the researcher to investigate the problem.
- It must be ethical for the researcher to investigate the problem” (p. 18).

APPENDIX C

Reasons for Coming to America

For the sake of education, during the teenage years, the international students leave their homelands and social networks behind. More than 51% of students claimed that they made the decision to come to America to study while approximately 48% of them were sent to America by their parents and 1% by their relatives. Approximately 91% of them plan to go to a university in America. Approximately 39% stated that they would return to their home countries, and 52% of them were not sure (Yin, 2013).

The reasons for them to come to America were: (a) to learn English so that they could have a better job in the future; (b) to have an education in America because education here is more advanced; (c) to have a second chance so they could go to a university; and (d) their parents sent them to America to study so they could have a good future. None of the students stated that they came to America for a Christian education even though 81% of students knew Riverside School is a private Christian school before they came (Yin, 2013). Although the major reason for them to come to the States was to learn English for a better future, approximately 64% of students preferred to speak their native languages after school because they felt comfortable and relaxed.

Coming to America

The correlation between their preferred language and the number of one semester is presented in Figure 1. It does not matter how long an international student has been in residency of the program, the majority of them still prefer to speak their native languages.

It is known that being bilingual is an advantage rather than a disadvantage (Bialystok & Viswanathan, 2009). However, learning English is one of the major reasons for them to come to the States. With the intention to help ELL students learn English, some schools intend to have “English-only” policies, in which ELLs are mandatorily required to speak English on and off campus, whereas some other schools allow ELLs to speak their native language off campus, but not on campus.

However, socio-culturally, with the “English-only” policy, the students are forced to completely detach from their languages and cultures despite a possible opportunity for them to associate with someone from the same culture. In contrast, few opportunities are provided for them to build up new relationships with day students and students from other cultures. Additionally, from an academic perspective, they came to America during their teenage years, and they have developed the cognitive skills that need to be processed in their native language when they first arrived here. Therefore, instead of having a school-wide policy, international students should be encouraged to speak English as much as they can, and opportunities should be provided to help them socialize with day students such as appointing a native speaker as a study partner with them, encouraging international students to share the cultural differences as well as the differences in education of their home countries with day students, for example.

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

The following is the list of interview-guide the researcher used to direct the interview questions:

- The interview was an unstructured interview and open-ended rather than close-ended questions. The rationale is to enable the interviewees to be able to speak freely without constraining responses.
- The interview questions were kept short and to the point.
- The use of language in the questions was be deigned to be understood by the interviewees or participants.
- All interview questions were relevant to the research questions; to help the researcher meet the study's aims and objectives.
- The researcher's proposal involves working with human subjects, the interview process was approved by the institutional review board (IRB); which is responsible to ensure that your research is completely ethical.
- The researcher assured participants of commitment to confidentiality. Participant will also be advised of their rights to privacy as well any potential for emotional issues arising from retelling of their stories.
- The researcher informed all participants that the interviews will be recorded.

APPENDIX E

Transcript of raw data collected from participants during the interview

Interview 1

The active interviewees in the study are labeled as Participant-1 beginning with

Participant-1 through Participant-20 by the researcher. R= researcher and “RC”

represent Researcher comments.

Participant-1 is an international student from the Democratic Republic of Congo at

North Hennepin Community College. The researcher met with the participant on NHCC campus for the interview.

Researcher: Participant-1, thank you for agreeing to the interview this afternoon. As you know I am a doctoral candidate from the University of Saint Thomas who is interested in exploring the lived experiences of international students at North Hennepin Community College. You are an active international student at this college, which is why I want to talk to you. What are some of the challenges affecting your social life while studying in the United States?

Participant-1: I feel home sick when away, because I missed my family a lot, but I sometimes talk to my family members such as father, mother brothers and sisters or cousins, or advisor concerning the issues I encountered.

Researcher: Can you describe specifically examples of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant-1:

Socially, it to make friends or make you do not know. You are from different country and culture; all that make thing even difficult. These examples definitely affected my

academic work. When you are away from home, you need at least one or two persons to talk to, to hang out and do extra curriculum activities with occasional. Sometimes, this hard to do when you do not have that part of social life fulfilled.

Researcher: do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here? If you have, how it affected your studies?

Participant-1: Yes, it has been so when I feel lonely sometimes; most of the time, it affects my studies. I come from a collective society where people do things together, in the family or as a community; well as here in the United States, there is much emphasis on individual success and accomplishments. This has an impact feeling lonely when you are away from home.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college? If so, please explain

Participant-1: well, for me adapting to the readings sometimes was difficult to me; because English is my second language. Another one is the climate or weather but eventually, I am getting used to it and making improvement. When I first came here, the weather was one of the issues with; driving in the snow or cold and worrying about accidents because you are not used to been in type of environment. Those were some of the issues I had to worry about during my first year in the U.S.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant-1: The academic system is very good but demands self-discipline, especially in the college environment. The instructor will not talk to students about schedule

deadlines or doing assignments. Those are things you the student should be aware of etc. Another example is the way things are arranged or divided; those were some of my challenges from the beginning.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant-1: the way teaching is done here makes things easy compare to being back home. For example, using book, (very mandatory in the U.S.). Also like the test is giving at the college is easier. Scheduling and moving from class to class are some of the differences. Learning style at my home country is mostly memorization; compare to how it is done in the U.S. Learning is difficult at my home country.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college? Are performance expectation the same compare to your home country? If they are different, how are they different?

Participant-1: Here, it is much better, there is no rush; there is flexibility here in the U.S.; whereas, at home, there is no flexibility and too much rush. However, flexibility in the United States does not mean a free pass to get away with things that need to be done. It is just obvious that you should know to do.

Researcher: what experiences have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.? How would you describe you oral and written communication skills? How is having such or not having them affect your learning experience?

Participant-1: From the beginning, it was difficult to communicate. What helped me was taking the ELL classes. Other things that helped me were reading and writing in English, living with American family, and doing activities in the English language.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student? What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant-1: I have stress, fear, etc. because I do not know what is going to happen, to complete; with my family being far away, while trying to meet their expectations. For example, fear of being responsible for my own life; fear of decision making as a young person; and fear of performing poorly academically.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at this college? How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant-1: There is no problem with diversity at this college. There is a French class that I belong to with people from diverse groups. However, getting job is a bite difficult as an international students. Priority is given to the U.S. citizens, instead of international students. I also participate in student success day as well.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you feel that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

Participant-1: The need for more opportunities for international students. There is no laboratory for construction engineering major on campus. There is no college sponsor program for students in my field. NHCC does have a lot of resources to help such as

students' clubs, etc., so the college should provide opportunities for international students.

Interview 2

Interview with Participant 2, an international student from Peru, Central America.

The student has been enrolled at Century College for over a year. Participant's native language is Spanish but speak English fairly well.

Researcher: Participant 2, thanks for the willingness to talk to me. You know that I am real interested in exploring your lived experiences as international student at this college. You are pretty active, which is why I want to talk to you. What are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

Participant 2: Meeting people, coming from another country; a big challenge. You are not sure how people will respond when you make the attempt to say something to them. Not talking to a stranger is something that people cautious about in the United States. Feeling uncertain as an international student make many foreign-born students to stay by themselves or not say much native-born people.

Researcher: Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 2: Meeting people, coming from another country; a big challenge. Sometimes you feel reluctant to say anything. This is a challenge when you do not who to trust to begin be-friend since you are uncertain the reaction the other person will display on you. So, trusting people is a difficult thing to do because of safety reason.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

Participant 2: Yes, loneliness sometimes, you want to hang out with people, which is different from country of origin. Sometimes, I called mom, friends, or walked around the neighborhood are ways I deal with the challenges. These are way I deal with my loneliness as an international student.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

Participant 2: Yes, other issues such cultural shock, financial issue to limited work hours on campus. When I first came to the U.S., a lot of things were difficult for me. For example, driving and opening up to strangers. As time goes on, I began to have some confident in certain situations as well as the environment I live. There were other issues like assimilations in the American culture became a bite easier. By then, I have learned the adjustment process at the end of my first year and getting to know the environment and the people. Life is all about making adjustments to be able to be successful.

Researcher: (b) Please explain your experiences

Participants 2: Financial issues, especially coming from another country, cannot, or not allowed to work full-time; only 20 hours per week, on campus. Transportation is another issue. Some areas in the Tywin Cities, one has to have a vehicle to get around. This means having a car and knowing how to drive because those areas are not assessable to public transportation.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 2: Language or communication was an issue that affected my academic performance; but getting better. Speaking with an accent is part of the problem when you are foreign-born student. Other issues are immigration status and differences in learning styles which not necessarily the same compare to the learning styles I am used to in my home country.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning styles in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 2: There are technology or more resources in the U.S. compare to my country of origin.

Researcher: Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student? (b) If so, how has your financial issue affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 2: Sometime that is an issue, which impacts on your focus in school.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college? Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country? If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 2: Academic expectations is good here. But there are less expectations in my country, as a result, you are expected to work harder.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

Participant 2: You have a strong accent, sometimes. However, there has been some improvement with my communication skills.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student? If so, what sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 2: Family time is missed, home sick, or some family members may pass on while you are away, etc. These events among are examples of emotional issues I can think of as international student.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compared to other students studying at your institution?

Participant 2: Century College is very welcoming, I have participated in clubs and other student groups. I was once president of International Students Association on campus.

Researcher: How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 2: No issues

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview? If so, what are they?

Participant 2: Better opportunity for international students to work; 20 hours per week is not enough.

Interview 3

Interview with Participant 3, a nursing major Cameroon, Central Africa. The student has been enrolled at Century College for a year and half. Participant speaks both English and French because he comes from a bi-lingual country where both languages are spoken officially for business.

Researcher: Participant 3 thank you for the willingness to sit with me to discuss this topic. As you may already know from the dean of students and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, I am very much interested in exploring lived experiences of international students at Century; of which you are an active part. That is why I want to talk to you. So, what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

Researcher: (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 3: Because I am paying out of my pocket; this makes this even harder.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

(a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?

(b) (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 3: Yap, I feel lonely sometimes from friends, family; from home, etc.

(b) I managed to deal with loneliness by going to places at school; however, I do not socialize much. I sometimes walk in the neighborhood, which is my way of dealing with the issues.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 3: Other challenges, are communication in general.

(b) Sometimes when communicating, you are not understood because of the accent. You are coming from another culture.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 3: Other academic challenges will be technology. Example, typing on computer to complete assignments, etc.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 3: Teaching in the U.S. is more simplified compared to my home country.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 3: Expectation in the U.S. is different.

(a) There are more resources here.

(b) Things are broken down or more simplified here than at my home country.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 3: My written communication skill has been an asset.

(b) So my oral communication has also been helpful.

Researcher: Have you had any emotional issues as an international students?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 3: No issues

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 3: Very inclusive, at Century Campus. (a) For example, the school promotes diversity at all levels.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 3: Recognition of immigrant student's talents, suggestions, ideas, etc.

Interview 4

Interview with Participant 4, a nursing major Cameroon, Central Africa. The student has been enrolled at Century College for one year. Participant speaks both English and French because he comes from a bi-lingual country where both languages are spoken officially for business. Although, He speaks his native language as well; which is case for most Africans.

Researcher: Participant 4, I want to thank you for agreeing to discuss your experience as international student at Century College. You are an active student, which is why I want to talk to you. If you could tell me some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 4: Cultural shock, everything here is very different.

- (a) Here, Americans are more extraverted compared to my home country.
In the U.S. there are issues of boundary in space and communication.
Everyone is different.

Researcher: Do you feel you lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 4: Loneliness, yes;

- (a) Missed parents.
- (b) But I made friends even before I came to Century. That was not an issue.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 4: No concerns or challenges.

Researcher: What are other challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 4: Not a challenge, it is even easier here in the U.S. than at home. At home, academic is more detailed than here in the U.S. In other words, learning harder back home.

Researcher: Do you see any different in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 4: Here, you receive exactly what to expect; whereas, in my home country, there is much more hard work. Personally, that is not a problem for me, but that is the reality.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 4: Here, there are more expectations compare to home country.

(a) The system does not teach students to think intellectually.

(b) Back home, students are taught to have independent thinking.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your leaning experience?

Participant 4: My oral and written communication are good.

(A & b) therefore, it is a plus or strength for me.

Researcher: Have you experience any emotional issues as an international student? (a)

What sort of have you experienced?

Participant 4: All international students missed; for example, food, environments, clothing, etc. (a) everything.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compared to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 4: Diversity is good.

(a) There is no problem

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 4: No;

(a) You covered everything.

Interview 5

Interview with Participant 5 who, is a biology major from Vietnam, Southeast Asia. The student has been enrolled at North Hennepin Community College for over a year now.

The participant speaks English very well, even though she is an international student at the college. The participant also works on campus at the library or media center.

Researcher: Participant 5, I want to thank you for agreeing to do the interview. From dean's recommendation, you are an active student, which why I want to talk to you. Tell me some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 5: Most challenging thing, for me is my status.

- (a) I am F-1 Visa holder; it is difficult to find job outside of campus.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you not felt that way, what do you do keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 5: Not really but occasionally, it was for the first year.

- (a) Make more friends, do things you like;
- (b) For example, go to the gym, read a lot, study, watch movie, etc.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences

Participant 5: I have some difficulties with my finances.

- (a) Because I am living by myself; my transportation cost is a challenge for me.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 5: I do very well academically; however, because of my F-1 Visa status, I cannot get job like internship in my field as a biology major.

Researcher: Do you see any difference in the teaching and learning styles in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 5: There are significant differences. For example, in Vietnam, there is more focus on theories, and less resources like hand outs and hands on trainings for students in my home country. Whereas, here in the U.S., there are lot more resources to support academic work.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college? (Are performance expectations the same compare to your country? If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 5: Back home, I studied because I had to, but here in the U.S., I studied because I want to.

Researcher: What experiences have you had with communications as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 5: Sometimes I am not too confident with my speaking skills.

(a) But I am confident with writing skills.

(b) It has an impact sometimes on my learning

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international students?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 5: Life gets rough, incidents happen, etc. Being home, there is a lot of support from family members; whereas here, only friends and my fiancée.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compared to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 5: There is no problem with diversity on this campus.

(a) I once served as president of the Vietnamese Students Association. I am also one of the founders of the association.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 5: There is no suggestion

Interview 6

Interview with an active participant at North Hennepin Community College. P6 is an international student from Nigeria. He is a pre-engineering major for over a year now at the college. Like the rest of the interviews, researcher is the primary interviewer and participant is the interviewee.

Researcher: Participant 6, thank so much for the willingness to the interview this morning. You know I am doing a study on the experiences of international students at this college. From the dean's record you are an active student; which is why I want to

talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 6: I do not have any social challenges because of the way North Hennepin Community College is set up.

- (a) Academically, the work load is different. It is a bite harder to me compare to back home or home country.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 6: I do have family here in the U.S.

- (a) Therefore, loneliness has not been an issue for me.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 6: Other issues will be putting high expectations on myself.

- (a) Hard work to do well. North Hennepin Community College is giving me the privilege to do well.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 6: No major issues that impact me academically.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 6: It is arguable that here is better than back home country. Example, class size, grading system, easier to reach teacher, etc. Another example will be examination styles; which is given periodically.

(a) Other socially related expensive, you are on your own, to meet up with those needs.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 6: Expectations are more difficult at home compare to the U.S.

(A & b) Self-discipline, compare to back home

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 6: I am from an English speaking country.

(a) Therefore, communication has been a skill that adds to my success.

(b) So, oral and written communication have not been a problem for me.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 6: I do missed some of the things I am used to doing back home.

(a) However, using media has been a plus; because it allowed me to see what is going on back home.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 6: There is no form of discrimination to what I can do campus.

(a) Example, I am a member of the Student Senate on campus.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 6: Giving international students the opportunities to do things outside of campus.

(a) For example, working full-time, internship off campus.

Interview 7

Interview with P7 Interview with an active participant at North Hennepin Community College. P7 is an international student from Nigeria. He is also pre-engineering major for over a year now at the college. Like the rest of the interviews, researcher is the primary interviewer and participant is the interviewee.

Researcher: Participant 7, thank you for agreeing to discuss with me your lived experiences as international student at North Hennepin community College. According to the dean's record, you are one of the active students in the program; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

(a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at the college?

Participant 7: I had issues with my accent, understanding the community etc.

(a) I deal with it by making more friends.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

(a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?

(b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 7: I do not feel lonely

(A & B) Because I have friends.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 7: Financial problems, for example, tuition has been my issue.

(a) Because I am allowed as an international student to work part-time, only 20 hours per week.

Researcher: What are other of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 7: Other types of challenges will be school work, my job and other activities.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 7: There are more resources compare to home country. Here in the United States, you get all the help you need; whereas at home, you learn if you to learn.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 7: Back home it is much harder than here in the U.S.

(a) In the U.S. there is more resources.

(b) For example, at home, it is really difficult to reach your instructor compare to here.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

Participant 7: English is the primary language in my home country.

(A & B) I have no issues communicating in English. Even at home, English is spoken regularly in my family. So having such is very helpful.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 7: No, there are emotional issues to negatively impact my study.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 7: I feel included in activities on campus.

(a) For example, I am a member of the student event team, here on campus.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 7: I don't think so.

(a) However, I do not know that in other community colleges.

Interview 8

Interview with participant 8 who is an environmental science major at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Participant 8 is an international student from Nigeria. He has been a student at the college for two years. Participant will be referred to as "Participant 8" and the primary researcher will be referred to as "Researcher" in this interview.

Researcher: Participant 8, thank you for agreeing to discuss your experiences as this college. According to the dean of the college, you are one of the active international students; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially and academically at this college?

Participant 8: Cultural shock.....

- (a) For example, seeing a new way of life; where everybody is for himself or herself. Others include food, weather, etc.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 8: Sure I have

- (a) I missed home, friends, etc.
- (b) I watch movies, listen to songs that I am used to or go to church where most Africans go to.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 8: The challenges of trying to fit in the society or the school community.

- (a) The educational system is different. You see what you are learning, etc. here in the U.S.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 8: There is more to do, like assignments and other things to do academically. Here one can have access to the instructor etc. and more resources in the U.S.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to you home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?
- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 8: There are lots of differences. Examples, more resources like tutoring center, where students go for support.

- (a) Financial issue is one of the differences or challenges. The can create stress that impact my academic success.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

- (a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?
- (b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 8: Expectations are the same.

- (a) However, in the U.S., students are pushed to do better to be able to meet the expectations.

(b) Also, there are more resources in the U.S.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 8: Communication skills are added volume.

(a) For me, English is my first language.

(b) So, that is not an issues.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 8: Yes, it goes back to when I first came to the U.S.;

(a) Because I felt that I am different from everybody else. However, as time goes on that situation has gotten better.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 8: It is inclusive; the college.

(a) It is now left with the students to assert themselves.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so what are they?

Participant 8: International students are not allowed jobs outside of the campus;
sometime because of their status.

(a) Not working outside of campus, a problem.

Interview 9

Interview with participant 9 who is an international student from Liberia. Participant 9 is a biology major at North Hennepin Community College. The student has been at the college for over a year. The interview was conducted late in the afternoon on campus.

Researcher: Participant 8, thank you for agreeing to discuss your lived experiences at this college. You are very involved and active on this campus; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S?

(b) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 9: Meeting with new people; therefore, there are cultural differences.

(a) How I go about saying certain things to people in the community college.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

(c) If you have, how has it affected your studies?

(d) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 9: Yes, it is lonely.

(a) Because I have all my parents and other relatives at home country.

(b) Sometimes keep in mind your purpose for being here, that motivates me.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 9: I have other issues.

(a) For example, transportation, or internship opportunities at the college.

Because of status, certain opportunities are not available to me or I excluded.

Researcher: What other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 9: As an international student, there are low expectations by both instructors and peers who are U.S. citizens. Usually that happens at the beginning and eventually may fade away.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

(b) If so, how has your financial issue affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 9: There are differences: example, as a biology major, there is much better laboratory equipment and better resources that are not available at home. The difference also include the grading system here at the college; which is much more transparent.

(A & b) Financially, it is an issue but not all the time.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they difference?

Participant 9: More pressures back home.

(a) Whereas here at this college, it is a bite lay back.

(b) Example, I take 16 credit hours back home; and it was harder than here, taking the same credit hours.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 9: Communication is not an issue for me.

(a) Because English is my first language.

(b) This serves as a plus in my academic work.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 9: No emotional issues

(a) None

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 9: The answer is yes, the college is inclusive of everyone. It wants everyone to be involved.

(a) Example, I am a member of different student groups on campus.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 9: So far, so good.

(a) However, funds for international students are not enough; that includes limited work hours.

Interview 10

Interview with a student who is computer science major from Nigeria at North Hennepin Community College. He will be described as Participant 10 during the interview process. Participant 20 has been at North Hennepin for one and half years as an international student.

Researcher: Participant 10, thank you for the willingness to discuss your experiences at this college. According to college record, you are a very active international student; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

(a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 10: I have no major social challenge, because my high school back home was an international school.

(a) So, that prepared me to mix with other people

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

(e) If you have, how has it affected your studies?

(f) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 10: I did at first, but now I made more friends at the college.

(a) No impact on studies

(b) However, I do miss family members at home.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experience.

Participant 10: At first the teaching was different.

(a) Now I have emerged myself to the system.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 10: No major issues, because the teachers here are more flexible. Even though, work load is more; but back home, it is even harder.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?
- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 10: Here you have more space to breath. There is more flexibility; whereas back home, the style of learning is rigorous.

- (a) For financial issues, that is a non-issue.
- (b) No impact on my ability to be successful.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

- (a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?
- (b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 10: Here, students are not stressed too much.

- (A & b) Whereas, back home, it is more Rigorous.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 10: English is my first language of communication; However, Yoruba is my second or tribal language.

(A & b) So, speaking English has been a plus in my learning experience.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 10: There has not been any emotional issue that affect my academic. No other issues.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 10: No, I think this college is very inclusive; I have made many friends.

(a) Example, Diversity and Equity Center that promotes everyone.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 10: Job is really hard to come by.

(a) For example, it would be better if international students can get employment outside of campus.

Interview 11

Interview with an active participant from Pakistan at Anoka-Ramsey Community College. Participant 11 is an Exercise Science at the college. He has been attending the college for one year as an international student. In this interview, the interviewee is described as participant 11 and the primary investigator described as the researcher.

Researcher: Participant 11, thank you for agreeing to the interview this afternoon. You are an active student according to the dean's record, which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 11: People live different: meaning different protocol, cultures, personalities, diversities, etc.

- (a) Therefore, it is difficult to even make friends; is one example.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt this way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 11: Sometimes, I do.

- (a) For example, at home, it is lot easier, to make friends; whereas here in the U.S., is different.
- (b) I focus on myself, which is how I deal with loneliness.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

Please explain your experiences.

Participant 11: The weather.....

(a) The transportation, etc.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 11: Learning the culture, the city, which takes some time.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

(b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 11: The principles are the same in terms of content and styles.

(a) However, there are more resources, motivations; therefore, students learn much better here in the U.S.

(b) Obviously, financial issues are always an issue as an international student because I do not get financial aid.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 11: Here, the expectations are much harder than home.

(A & B) Here, it is time consuming compare to home; to get thing done, etc.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication skills?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 11: There has been no problem with communication

- (a) No problem,
- (b) Therefore, it poses no challenge to my academic success.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

- (a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 11: Yes, people are selfish, or individualized.

- (a) I have to be very careful, before someone takes advantage.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student; compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 11: I am included

- (a) Everyone is welcoming here.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 11: Learn the content of the subject to be successful academically.

Interview 12

Interview with an international student from Kenya, East Africa. The interviewee will be described as Participant 12 for the purpose of confidentiality. The participant is a nurse major at North Hennepin community College for over a year now.

Researcher: Participant 12, thank you for agreeing to discuss your experience at this community college.

You are an active student at the college, according to the dean record, which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 12: Connecting with my people, as a Kenyan, or gender differences in the college.

- (a) For me, that was the most social challenge.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 12: My immediate family is here in the U.S.

- (a) However, I feel disconnected in my culture.
- (b) Since I was raised in the U.S. from my teen age years as a child.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 12: My experiences in the U.S. or at this college; some advisors are not that knowledgeable about international system.

(a) For example, some don't know issue like immigration, taxes, etc. to assist international students.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 12: An over look on me about my status as a Kenyan; thinking that I am not fit academically.

Researcher: Do you see differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

Participant 12: No don't have any experience since I grew up in the U.S.

Researcher: Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

(a) If so, how has your issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 12: Financially, I am unable to work outside of the college campus, and only working is 20 hours per week.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 12: Because this a community college, it is very supportive compare to a four-year traditional university.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (b) (b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 12: No experience.

(A & b) Because I speak only English and grew up here from seven years old.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

- (a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 12: Not working in my field of study because of my status.

- (a) As a result, I am unable to get the type of assistant I need.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity of inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 12: Not enough outreach or advertisements to international students.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 12: Multicultural office should be much stronger.

- (a) More reaching out to international students.

Interview 13

Interview with an international student from Thailand. The participant is a computer science major at North Hennepin Community College. He has been attending the college for two years now. We met on campus in the afternoon during his break before going to his next class. The student will be described as participant 13 to protect his confidentiality.

Researcher: Participant 13, thank you for agreeing to the interview this afternoon. You know I am interested in the international student program that you are a very active part; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 13: I have to enroll full-time in order to have a credit; that takes away from my social life.

- (a) I am not outgoing person socially, so that might be a challenge socially for me.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 13: It happens sometimes, yes it does.

- (a) To deal with the challenges by calling my mother and siblings.

(b) In addition, I mostly read different books, etc.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

(a) Please explain you experiences.

Participant 13: For me trying to be more responsible;

(a) For example, taking care of my personal needs like sleeping, eating, or myself, etc. are few of the challenges.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 13: For me, it will be trying to work on campus. Another challenge will be to be careful working on how to schedule myself to study.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

(b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 13: I want to say, that there are big differences.

(a) Yes, in Thailand, students don't choose much; whereas, in the U.S., you can choose, and be more freed.

(b) No, I do not have any financial issues.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 13: It is a bite harder in my home country compare to the U.S.

(A & b) Here in the U.S., there are more resources; which makes a big difference.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 13: It is a challenge, because the meaning of words can be confusing sometimes.

(a) Both oral and written.

(b) However, I can say, writing is much easier for me in expressing myself than oral communication.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 13: For me, it will be, thinking that I have not done something enough.

(b) Being hard on myself to be perfect.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 13: Not much problem for me.

- (a) However, I would like to meet with people who shared the same interests with me.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 13: I do not think so.

- (a) At least not yet.

Interview 14

Interview with a student from Nigeria at North Hennepin Community College. The participant has been a student at the college for one year and five months. The participant is a nurse major at the college. The student will be described as participant 14 to protect his confidentiality during this data collection process. The primary investigator on the other hand will be described as the researcher.

Researcher: Participant 14, thank you for the willingness to do this interview.

According to the dean's record, you are very active international student which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially and academically at this college?

Participant 14: I don't have much social issues except for transportation, the weather and academic load or work

- (a) Those are the only challenges that impact my social life.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep you from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 14: Sometimes, I do feel lonely.

- (a) However, I have family here in the U.S. But I missed my mama.
- (b) By calling them; Dad, Ma, and other siblings. That is how I deal with it.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 14: No major issues.

- (a) None what so ever.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 14: It is harder back home than in the U.S. However, there are lots of home work here as well. Time management is part of my academic challenge. There are more resources in the U.S. compare to back home.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?
- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 14: Yes, there are lot of differences in the learning. Back home, teaching is direct; whereas, you are encouraged to apply what you learn in the U.S. For example, there is syllabus provided for students to explain what to expect; whereas, that is unknown back home.

(a) (A & b) Financial issue is not a problem.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 14: I think it is the same.

(a) Back home it is mostly about your GPA.

(b) Resources make a difference in the U.S.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 14: Communication is a plus for me.

(a) Because is my first language.

(b) However, I preferred writing or communicating in writing.

Researcher: Have you had any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 14: Relationship is a bite an issue.

(a) Making a close connect7ion with people is hard in the U.S.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 14: Yes, I feel included here on this campus.

- (a) For example, I am a member of the Student Senate Council.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 14: Not really.

Interview 15

Interview with a participant from Liberia at North Hennepin Community College.

The participant has been at North Hennepin for two years as an international student.

The student is an elementary education major at the college. For the purpose of this interview, the interviewee was described as participant 15 to protect his confidentiality.

Researcher: Thank you participant 15 for agreeing to the interview this evening. You know I am interested in learning about your program. You are an active international student; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 15: The challenges I faced when I came to the U.S. was bullying and not speaking a lot.

(a) Because my English was not clear enough to the Americans.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

(a) If you have, how has it affected your studies

(b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 15: Yes, I do

(a) I missed some of the things I am used to.

(b) For example, not understanding college life.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming student at this community college?

(a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 15: Home work at college are sometimes very hard.

(a) Paying out of my pocket, peer pressures, etc.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 15: Academically, I struggle a lot with my grade, doing homework.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 15: Learning style in the U.S. flexible; you are forced to learn, technology is available, and other resources make things easier in learning in the U.S.

(A & b) Financial; no problem.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

(A) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

Participant 15: Instructors are too flexible.

(A) Sort of in the middle in the U.S vs home

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 15: Communication; this was a problem, initially.

(A & b) But I have improved with my English language.

Researcher: Have you any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 15: People are selfish in the U.S.

(a) For example, socialization is a problem. Making friends is not easy.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 15: I do not get involve with extra curriculum activities on this campus.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 15: Helping international students get a job anywhere; helping international students with employment opportunities – a big need.

Interview 16

Interview with an international student from Nigeria at North Hennepin Community College. The student is studying to become a nurse. At the time of the interview, she has been at the college for one semester. For the purpose of protecting student's confidentiality, the student was described as participant 16; while the primary investigator was described as researcher.

Researcher: Participant 16, thank you for agreeing to do the interview today. You know that I am interested in learning the lived experiences of international students at this college; which is why I want to talk to you this afternoon. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 16: Not really.

- (a) But Minnesota is sort of unique; therefore, most international students tend to interact with one another.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 16: Sometimes

- (A & b) The academic work load can be more of an issue for me.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences.

Participant 16: I don't think so;

- (a) I have not experienced any other issues.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 16: There are differences. I transferred here from another college. Here in the U.S., it is more of a critical thinking; whereas back home, you have to cram. However, in the U.S., you have to apply yourself to learn. Instructors here are more approachable here than back home, more resources, etc.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?

- (b) If so, how has your financial issue affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 16: Critical is a plus in the U.S. system.

- (a) As international students, we have or are required to take full-time credit, to keep my status at 12-credit level. This also affects my financial problem.
- (b) Also work hours is not enough to sustain a student with international status. Expectation is more rigorous in the U.S.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

- (a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?
- (b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 16: Expectations are more rigorous in the United States compare to my home country.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

Participant 16: Communication is a plus for me, because English is my first language.

Researcher: Have you had any emotional issues as an international student?

- (a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 16: One thing is the stereotyping about Black people, religion, etc.

- (a) All that might have emotional impact on my participation.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 16: No problem with diversity

(a) No problem.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

(a) If so, what are they?

Participant 16: More scholarship for international students from the college, or the government (state or federal); increase the opportunities for international students to work on campus as well as off campus.

Interview 17

Interview with a student from the Gambia, West Africa. This international student is a pre-nursing major at North Hennepin community College. The participant has been at the college for one semester at the time of this interview. The student was described as participant 16 for confidentiality purpose.

Researcher: Participant 17, thank you for the willingness to the interview this afternoon. From the dean's record, you are an active student in the program; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 17: There is no social challenges.

- (a) Because I see people that are more like myself always on campus.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 17: I went through cultural shock such as language, making friends, etc.

- (a) I decided to have an open-mind.
- (b) Talking to people, calling my parents, friends at home.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

- (a) Please explain your experiences

Participant 17: I always see positive in people.

- (a) What you are looking for in people, is what you want to see (positive outlook to life)

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 17: Language is different; that is a little challenge. Sometimes, as international students, we are under rated, that too is a challenge.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S.

compared to your home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?
- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 17: Yes, there is a difference.

- (a) Here in the U.S., you have to understand the concept; whereas, back home, you have to cram everything or thing are comprehensive back home.
- (b) No problem with finance!!!

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations at this college?

- (a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?
- (b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 17: Schooling is harder in the U.S. than back home.

(A & b) Even though it is harder in the U.S., it is easier to pass here than back home.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 17: It is a challenge.

- (a) Because the words are different, the names are different

(b) Written is a plus for me, academically.

Researcher: Have you experienced any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 17: Seeing homeless people was an emotional concern for me.

(a) However, it did not affect my academic success.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

(a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 17: I am part of any student group.

(a) However, the college itself is a diverse community.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

If so, what are they?

Participant 17: If they can give international students opportunities to work, internship, etc.

(a) Since their status would not permit them to work outside of campus.

Providing international students with more opportunities, employment.

Interview 18

Interview with a student from Nepal, Southeast Asia. The student is an Information Technology major at North Hennepin Community College. The participant has been in

the United States for two and a half years as an international student. To protect his confidentiality, the interviewee was described as participant 18.

Researcher: Participant 18, thank you for agreeing to do the interview today. You know I am interested in understanding your lived experience as an international student at this college. According to the dean's record you are very active student; which is why I want to talk to you. Tell me what are some of the challenges affecting your social during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you describe specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at this college?

Participant 18: The main problem, because English is my second language; it posed a problem for me.

- (a) Another challenge is type of food when I go out to eat in places like restaurants, etc. Coming from Nepal, I do not know a lot of people from my country.

Researcher: Do you feel you are lonely and on your own while going to school to school here?

- (a) If you have, how has it affected your studies?
- (b) If you have not felt that way, what do you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 18: Yes, I feel lonely; especially when I first came to the U.S.

- (a) Now, this is my fourth semester; so it is bite easier now compare to the first time.

- (b) Deal with it by making myself busy, focusing more on my study and my girl- friend, spending time together.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own since becoming a student at this community college?

Please explain your experience.

Participant 18: People see you as international student, and would not want you to join them.

- (a) In activities on campus, etc.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 18: As a result of English been my second language, it posed a bite of challenge for me.

Researcher: Do you any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

- (a) Have you encountered any financial issues as an international student?
- (b) If so, how has your financial issues affected your ability to be successful since your enrollment at this college?

Participant 18: Yes, there are lot of differences. In college in my country, there is a dress code. Also in my country, we focused mainly on actual book than E book in the U.S.

- (a) For me, financial is an issue; especially when my parents would not sent my money on time.

(b) However, the financial issue does not impact my academic performance.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectation at this college?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different, how are they different?

Participant 18: In the U.S., academic performance is much better than my home country.

(A & b) As a result, my performance is really good here in the U.S.

Researcher: What experience have you had with communication skills?

(a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?

(b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 18: I will say it's been a challenge for me.

(a) For me oral is my strength or a plus

(b) Orally, I have improved a lot compare to when I first came.

Researcher: Have t you had any emotional issues as an international student?

(a) What sort of issues have you experienced?

Participant 18: I feel lonely from time to time.

(a) I used to talk a lot with people when I was back home; but not that much now in the U.S., because people sort of different here.

Researcher: What is your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can this community college improve academic success for international students?

Participant 18: Yes, it is inclusive; there are lot of diversity on campus.

- (a) For example, I have group of international students that I interact with on a daily basis.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 18: For me the college has everything working on campus. The big issue is providing employment opportunities for international student; both on and off campus is critical.

Interview 19

Interview with a student from Liberia. The participant is a business/finance major. Unlike other participants who are just coming to the United States, the participant has been in the U.S. for about two decades. However, the participant had an international status while going to college in the U.S. For the purpose of triangulating the data, the researcher decided to interview participant; who was described as participant 19 to protect the interviewee confidentiality.

Researcher: Participant 19, thank you for the willingness to the interview. You know that I am interested understanding your experiences as international student in the U.S.

Tell me what are some of the challenges that affected your social life during your study in the U.S.?

- (a) Can you described specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at college in the U.S.?

Participant 19: Yes, coming in the U.S. from Liberia, and not being high technology.

- (a) Family and school life, where one has to support a family and doing school work; and working full-time job. So that has an impact on my social life.

Researcher: Do you feel you were lonely and on your own going to school here?

- (a) If you were, how did it affect your studies?
- (b) If you did not feel that way, what did you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 19: Yes, to a point, with all the challenges, you don't know how to navigate the system, etc.

- (a) Sometimes, I do networking by talking to others who have been in the U.S. before; who have the experience, classmates, etc.
- (b) Are some of the ways that helped to keep from being lonely and on my own.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own when you were a student at the college you attended?

- (a) Please explain your experience.

Participant 19: As an African, communication was a bite of challenge.

(a) For example, speaking with an accent.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 19: It was different. Here is almost life “self-taught” approach in the U.S., unlike home country.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(a) Did you encounter any financial issues as an international student?

(b) If so, how your financial issues affected your ability to be successful when you enroll in college?

Participant 19: Home country, students take everything the teacher gives.

(a) Whereas, in the U.S., students explore, make students to work.

(b) Financial aid was a “way-maker” when you have status.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations in the U.S.?

(a) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(b) If they are different. How are they different?

Participant 19: Age was a factor in the academic performance.

(a) This was different in my home country.

(b) Much younger, single, etc.; which helps academic performance.

Researcher: What experience did you have with communication as a second language speaker in the U.S.?

- (a) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (b) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 19: Accent in the communication styles.

- (a) Oral and written communication is fine.
- (b) This was helpful in my school life.

Researcher: Did you experience any emotional issues as an international student?

- (a) What sort of issues did you experience?

Participant 19: You feel stress, sleepless night sometime.

- (a) Going to work, work load, all of that can cause emotional issues.

Researcher: What was your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (a) How can colleges and universities improve academic success for international students?

Participant 19: No or yea; for example, projects in group, sometimes your viewpoints are not taken seriously.

- (a) Coming from another country, and speaking with an accent, sometimes, you are not encouraged to participate in diversity activities.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

- (a) If so, what are they?

Participant 19: Job experience; sometimes, not getting the desire job, because of your accent, color etc., are some of the challenges.

Interview 20

Interview with a participant from Liberia. The participant is an information technology major. The participants been in the United States for over a decade now. Even though, the participant's legal status was eventually changed during the time he was in school in Minnesota. The participant's experience as a foreign-born student was similar to other participants in the study. For a while, the participant also had an international status and was treated like one before the change of legal status. For the purpose of triangulating the data, the researcher decided to interview participant 20 to determine if there is any commonality with other participant in the study.

Researcher: Participant 20, thank you for the willingness to the interview. You know that I am interested understanding your experiences as international student in the U.S. Tell me what are some of the challenges that affected your social life during your study in the U.S.?

(b) Can you described specifically example(s) of challenges you have encountered socially or academically at college in the U.S.?

Participant 20: Well, for me coming to the U.S. from Liberia, and not being high technology from the beginning was a real challenge. But over the years, I have my skills in this area.

- (b) Family and school life, where one has to support a family and doing school work; and working full-time job. So that has an impact on my social life.

Researcher: Do you feel you were lonely and on your own going to school here?

- (c) If you were, how did it affect your studies?
- (d) If you did not feel that way, what did you do to keep from feeling lonely and on your own?

Participant 20: Yes, there is certain point, with all the challenges, you don't know how to navigate the system, etc.

- (c) Sometimes, I do networking by talking to others who have been in the U.S. before; who have the experience, classmates, etc.
- (d) Are some of the ways that helped to keep from being lonely and on my own.

Researcher: Have you had any other issues besides loneliness and being on your own when you were a student at the college you attended?

- (b) Please explain your experience.

Participant 20: As a Liberian, communication was a plus for because we speak English most of the time at home and for business like when one goes to work or school. But there were some other challenges as well.

- (b) For example, speaking with an accent and meanings of some words.

Researcher: What are other types of challenges have you experienced in your academic life in the United States?

Participant 20: For me, it was different. Here is almost life “self-taught” approach in the U.S., when you have to learn and unlearn what you grew up with from home country.

Researcher: Do you see any differences in the teaching and learning style in the U.S. compare to your home country?

(c) Did you encounter any financial issues as an international student?

(d) If so, how your financial issues affected your ability to be successful when you enroll in college?

Participant 20: At my home country, students take everything the teacher is teaching; that is the way it was.

(c) Comparing this experiences to the U.S., students explored to seek answers, make students to work much harder for their money.

(d) Financial aid was a “way-maker” when I became a legal resident.

Researcher: How do you see academic performance expectations in the U.S.?

(c) Are performance expectations the same compare to your home country?

(d) If they are different. How are they different?

Participant 20: Expectations are critical here in the U.S. Self-discipline was a factor in the academic performance.

(c) This was different in my home country.

(d) Much younger, less responsibility etc.; which helps academic performance.

Researcher: What experience did you have with communication as a second language

speaker in the U.S.?

- (c) How would you describe your oral and written communication skills?
- (d) How is having such skills or not having them affected your learning experience?

Participant 20: Speaking with accent was part of my communication styles.

- (c) Oral and written communication is fine in spite of the accent.
- (d) This was also helpful in my social and academic life.

Researcher: Did you experience any emotional issues as an international student?

- (b) What sort of issues did you experience?

Participant 20: You feel stress out sometimes, sleepless night sometimes because of the work.

- (b) For me, going to work and the work load in general, all of these had an emotional impact on me.

Researcher: What was your experience with diversity or inclusion as an international student compare to other students studying at your institution?

- (b) How can colleges and universities improve academic success for international students?

Participant 20: Colleges and universities can improve academic success by providing more resources like support center and tutoring services for international students.

- (b) When you are from another country, and speaking with an accent, sometimes, you are not encouraged to participate in diversity activities without such support.

Researcher: Are there any issues or challenges you face that we have not discussed which you will like to discuss for this interview?

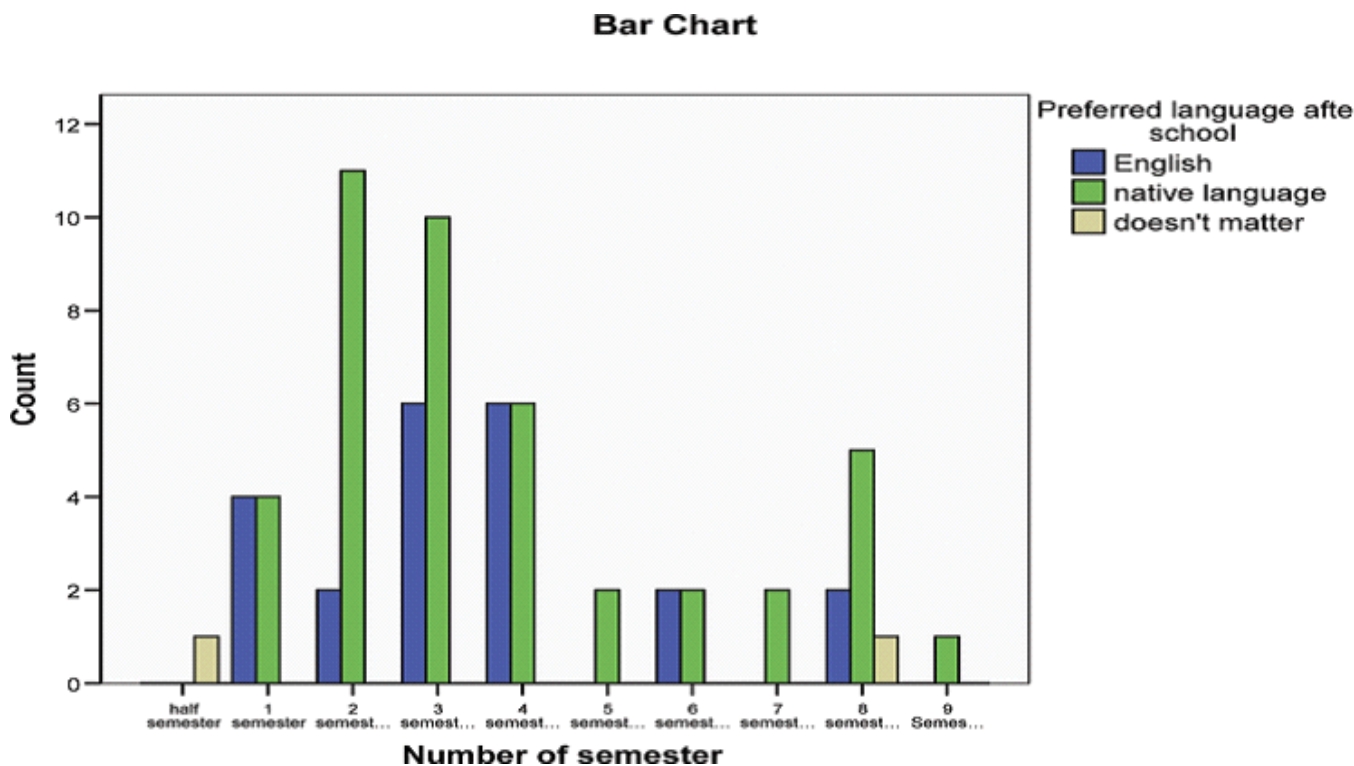
(b) If so, what are they?

Participant 20: There are other types of limitations that international students encounter.

Examples, not having network opportunities can prevent you from getting the desire job;

(b) Because of my accent and limited knowledge of American culture; especially in the first two to three years were some of the challenges.

This Bar Chart below shows the composition English Language speakers, those who are speakers of native language and those it does not matter to them.



Correlation between students' preferred language and the semester number (color figure available online).

The Reason for doing This Research

The researcher's personal experience as a foreign-born who has lived in the U.S for thirty-four years has also encountered experienced similar challenges and barriers in the United States; especially during the first few years of residency. Challenges and barriers such as financial issue, loneliness or social isolation, feeling of home sick, language barrier, etc. (Earnest, et al., 2010). The personal experiences created the level of interests and perspectives by the researcher early in the development of theoretical framework

about the topic. Consequently, building on the personal knowledge as well as what others have already learned about the topic was integral in the process. What sort of research or studies already been conducted in previous studies helped to inform the researcher in conceptualizing the theoretical or conceptual framework for this study. The above arguments justified the researcher's reasons, which helped to connect the "What" and the "How" of the inquiry.